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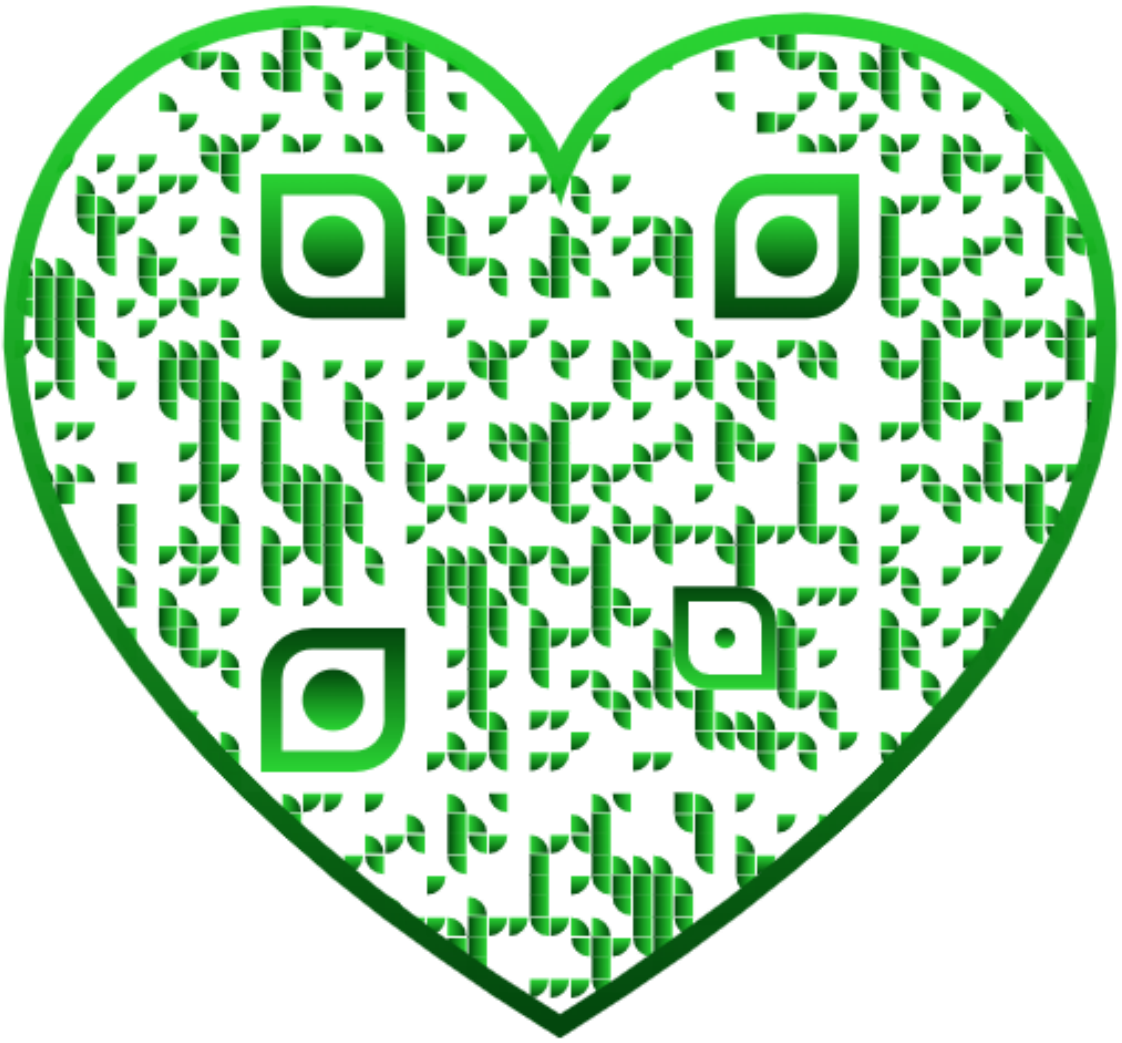

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Suffering for our art?

'Rosewood' was the word on everyone's lips at the recent NAMM Show in California and it's fair to say that even among prominent industry figures, there seemed to be different interpretations of the new CITES regulations and the implications for guitar manufacturers, retailers and their customers. There's also no shortage of speculation on online forums, but if you want to know what CITES means for buying, selling and travelling with guitars made using rosewood – or indeed if this is the first you've heard of any of this! – turn to page 32, where Dave Hunter explains all.

The conservation of endangered plant and animal species is of course a good thing, and a recent encounter with an amazing-sounding Civil War era Martin – ivory, horse hide glue, mother-of-pearl inlays, gut strings and all – got me thinking about the use of animal-derived materials in the guitar industry. As a vegetarian who tries to avoid buying leather or suede products, it's hard enough to find a decent pair of boots, let alone an amp handle or guitar strap, that isn't made of something's skin. There are cruelty-free alternatives available these days, but that doesn't change the fact that some of my favourite vintage and vintage-inspired gear doesn't tick the same ethical boxes as the other products I buy and consume. For strict vegans, it must be even tougher. Have any of you encountered a similar dilemma? If you have strong feelings on the matter, please write in...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

ED MITCHELL

Ed spent an enlightening 20 years in guitar retail in Glasgow before making the leap to journalism 15 years ago. Over the years he has owned just about every electric guitar there is, but has settled into a long-term relationship with a Gretsch Duo Jet...

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Opening bars...

Emerging talent on *G&B*'s radar and a chance to win an Empress Effects Reverb pedal

ONES TO WATCH

Oxford Blues

AARON KEYLOCK

Hard-rocking Oxford blues prodigy Aaron Keylock was tearing up stages in his home town by the age of 11, having first picked up the guitar at the age of eight, and judging by the evidence of a recent live performance *G&B* was treated to, he's used the past seven years very well indeed, honing his guitar chops to a level that belies his 18 years.

Debut album *Cut Against The Grain* dropped in January, highlighting Keylock's blues mastery and Southern-rock slide playing, with the raw-edged influence of heroes such as Rory Gallagher and Gary Moore plain to hear.

"I always loved the sound of honest music and always wanted to play guitar for as long as I can remember," Keylock tells *G&B*.

"All my earliest memories are music, really. I got my first guitar for Christmas when I was eight. It was a copy of a Strat, which I still have and play. I just had lessons once a week until I found the blues and just started jamming and learning how to improvise with great musicians.

"I guess the main guys for me were Keith Richards, Rich Robinson, Johnny Winter, Rory Gallagher and Nick Drake. I like guitarists who have their own sound and identity. Which is why I always loved Keith! Obviously, Johnny Winter and Rory Gallagher were both huge heroes to me as far as feeling and playing from the heart and for the song because they were both masters of that. And Nick Drake and Rich Robinson got me into the idea of using different tunings and coming up with different ways to write on the guitar, I guess, which was a big part for me!"

Setting out on the gigging circuit at the age of 11, Keylock remembers a key piece of advice early in his career: "I was about 12 years old and a good friend of mine who's a great guitarist/singer-songwriter, called Sam Hare, told me to just write what I want to write and not try to be anyone else. Honest music is always loved and respected, and people see through bullshit – that's kind of always lived with me as a young artist I guess."

That sound advice has been reinforced with valuable practical examples served up on a nightly basis as Keylock has clocked up the road miles alongside the likes of Wilko Johnson, The Cadillac Three, Blackberry Smoke, Joanne Shaw Taylor and JD Simo. "All of them are awesome bands/artists that I've loved and respected for a long time, so it really means a lot to see them come and watch stage-side for your show every night," he says. "I guess I've learnt mainly just how to live and work on the road, but also to make sure you play the song differently every night and to play it how you feel on the night to keep it an honest performance. All those guys are true artists, so things like that were great to pick up."

When *G&B* catches up with Aaron fresh from fret-scorching live action in Bristol, he's been rocking his Gibson Firebird into a cooking Marshall rig. "I'm using a Marshall Plexi head with a 1936 Marshall cab with Greenbacks in," he says. "I use a Gibson Standard Faded Les Paul, Gibson Firebird and a TSR Guitars Junior, which is really cool! TSR is an Oxford company that does custom builds. I got the Junior with a P-90 in mainly for slide, and it ended up on most of the album! I don't use any pedals, I just use the guitar to get as many tones as I can. I connect better with my instrument that way, I guess, and that's the world I've come from."

Keylock took a similarly straightahead approach during the recording of *Cut Against The Grain*, recorded last year in LA with Fabrizio Grosso, who has worked with the likes of Slash, Dave Navarro, Alice Cooper and Zakk Wylde.

"I had a lot of those songs for about three or four years and had been playing them at shows for that long, so it was great to take them into the studio with a fresh band as it made the songs feel brand new," remembers Keylock. "It was really relaxed. I went over and it was really just me and Fab sitting at the desk doing what we felt in the moment! We did the whole thing in just under two weeks, so it was a great experience!

"Fab was great, man! He was relaxed and we got on right from when we first met. He understood where I was coming from and he knew how to get that across best. We made the record together and the whole thing was just a great time!" **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE Blackberry Smoke, Gary Moore

GEAR *Aaron Keylock*

- **GUITARS** 2009 Gibson Standard Faded Les Paul, 2013 Gibson Firebird, TSR Guitars Korina Junior
- **AMPLIFIERS** Marshall 1987X head, Marshall 1936 2x12 cab with Celestion Greenbacks

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Which of the following is not a mode on the Empress Reverb?

a) Beer **b)** Ghost **c)** Cloud

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Letters from America

DAVE HUNTER makes the case for trying Randall Ball's irresistible, quirky updates of vintage-amp circuits, starting with the Skyliner '55

DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

For several years, many guitar bods have used the term 'suitcase amp' to describe the archaic-looking amplifiers of the 1930s and 40s, which often appeared to have been cobbled into old valises. They weren't, of course, but that was the style – and many did, in fact, feature latches, handles, and other hardware that came right out of the luggage-supply trade. Ball Amplification, on the other hand, while only a few years old, does actually build many of its guitar amps into characterful antique suitcases, and the results are utterly enticing. This small maker is nestled in the oddly shaped northeastern section of the state of West Virginia, a stone's throw from Harpers Ferry – where, in 1859, the famous abolitionist John Brown and a band of armed men raided the federal armoury in one of the significant precursor incidents to the American Civil War. It's about a two-hour drive from both Washington, DC, and Baltimore, Maryland. Ball's hometown of Kearneysville is, however, in an entirely more rural setting, and a locale somehow entirely befitting of these whimsical creations.

The Skyliner '55 combo here is housed in something your grandfather might have hauled from town to town around the American Midwest... if, in fact, he'd been a snake-oil salesman with a predilection for natty two-tone mock-croc luggage (which, most likely, he was not).

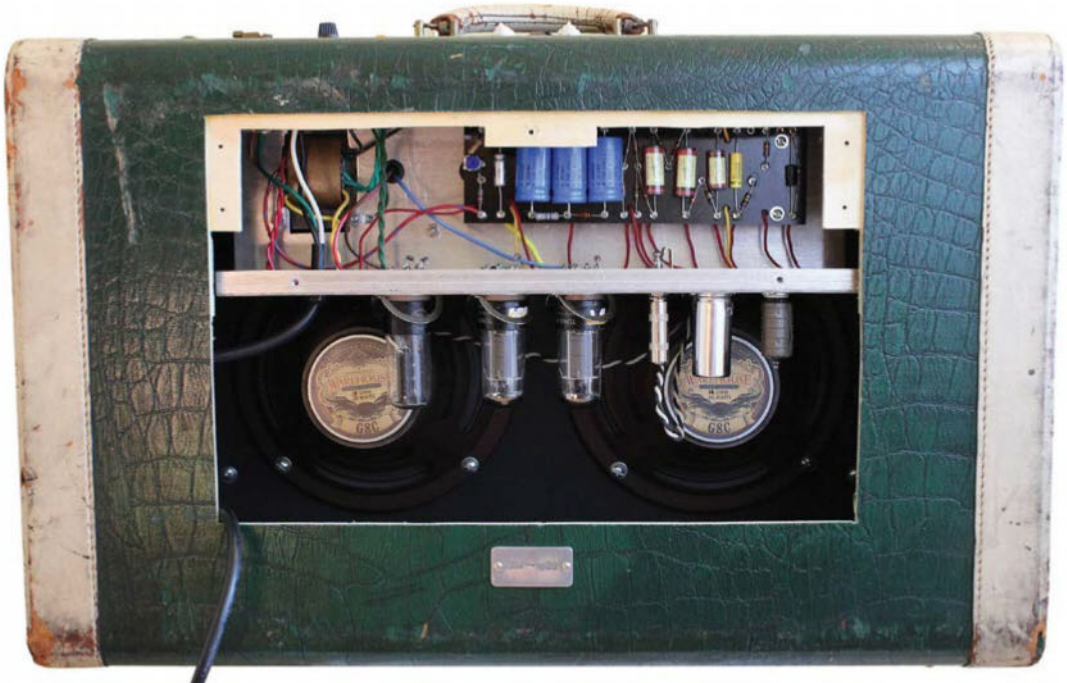
Which is to say, it is utterly cool in a surprisingly elegant retro-kitsch kind of way, and irresistible to most curious guitarists: 'ooh, what is that thing? What does it sound like?'

On the case

That 'thing' is, externally at least, a piece of genuine 1940s quality luggage. The answer to the latter question, though, might partly be hinted at by the fact that proprietor Randall Ball builds these quirky beauties largely around tried-and-tested circuits of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. This Skyliner '55 happens to house a close recreation of the mid-50s tweed Harvard circuit, which, in the original Fender combo, generated about 12 watts from a pair of 6V6s into a single 10-inch Jensen speaker. Other amps come in antique radio and television cases, while he builds the occasional original case, too. Other circuits replicated to date have included those of the tweed 5F1 Champ, 5F2A Princeton, and 5E3 Deluxe, and Ball is presently moving into other realms, reproducing his takes on the Valco 510 Super Supreme with octal preamp tubes, and the Gibson EH-150.

In each case, though, Ball gives things something of his own twist; notably for this Skyliner '55, it's the use of a pair of eight-inch Warehouse G8C speakers with ceramic magnets, rather than the Harvard's single Jensen P10R. He does, however, retain the original 5F10 circuit's unusual 6AT6 preamp tube, and even uses an NOS US-made JAN rendition in vintage metal shield to get the job done here. The 6AT6 is a seven-pin, single-triode tube that is sonically in the same arena

It is utterly cool in a surprisingly elegant retro-kitsch kind of way, and irresistible to most guitarists



KEY FEATURES

Ball Amplification Skyliner '55 combo

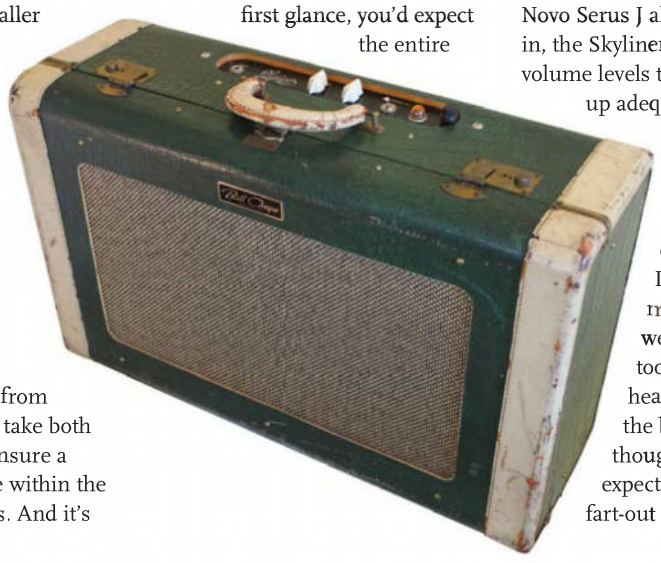
- **PRICE** £1,349 (approx, excluding shipping, VAT and other duties)
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone
- **OUTPUT** 12 watts (approx)
- **VALVES** 1x 6AT6 and one 12AX7 in the preamp and PI, two 6V6GT output tubes, 5Y3 rectifier
- **SPEAKERS** 2x 8" Warehouse G8C
- **DIMENSIONS** 26x15.5x8.5"
- **WEIGHT** 32lbs/14.5kg
- **CONTACT** ballamps.com

as the more familiar 12AY7 that appeared in other tweed Fenders of the day, which was not needed here due to the Harvard's inclusion of just a single channel.

Quality inside and out

Otherwise, the circuit is not unlike that of the far more familiar 5E3 Deluxe, minus one channel, other than in its use of a fixed-biased output stage, which should help the 6V6s run a bit tighter and more efficiently. This shift would normally enable a bit more volume, all else being equal, except that the Harvard (and the Skyliner '55 in its footsteps) had a smaller power transformer which delivered lower DC voltages on the 6V6s grids and plates, and used a smaller output transformer to translate that into speaker motion. But in that regard, Ball does go all-out: quality iron from Mercury Magnetics take both duties, helping to ensure a robust performance within the amp's specifications. And it's worth noting that two eight-inch speakers have more surface area than one 10-inch, so this amp should pump more air than its predecessor, too.

Components of note inside the chassis include several Fender Pure Vintage signal capacitors, expensive reproduction waxed Kraft paper and tin-foil caps intended to reclaim the magic of the vaunted red Astron caps of the early-to-mid 50s, along with Sprague Atom filter capacitors and carbon-comp resistors, all neatly assembled on a thick eyelet board, with tidy wiring runs throughout. At first glance, you'd expect the entire construction to be rather flimsy, given the thin wood-ply sides of the genuine antique suitcase, but it is not in the least.



Ball has lined this case with a stealth 'intra-skeleton', a full interior structure of solid pine, sort of a cabinet within a cabinet, which more than adequately supports all the heavier elements of the build. The speakers are attached to a reinforcing birch-ply baffle, which affixes sturdily to this pine interior. The result: despite appearances, this is a combo you could definitely cart from gig to gig without worry, although a custom-fit padded cover would be a wise investment if you want to protect the already 'real-life relic'd' exterior from further degradation.

Open-and-shut case

Much to my surprise, on first plugging in, I found this amp was also gig-worthy, volume-wise. If you're expecting a performance that's fun, retro, and characterful, but definitely limited to the music room and home studio, think again: with a 1957 Telecaster, a 1958 Les Paul Reissue, and a Novo Serus J alternately plugged in, the Skyliner '55 reached volume levels that would keep up adequately at many small-club gigs for styles short of heavy rock or metal (er, obviously?), and I expect it would mic up extremely well in larger venues, too. Its reasonable headroom levels were the biggest surprise, though; where I was expecting an ungodly fart-out well short of 11 o'clock, it actually held together decently somewhat past noon, even with P-90s injected, with a tasty crispness and edge-of-breakup tone, and bafflingly decent low-end from the dual eight-inch speakers in this shallow cab.

Pushed harder, the amp exhibits a meaty, vintage-leaning overdrive with lots of roiling texture, if a predominantly warm complexion, until you push the Tone control up to about three-quarters. At this level, the Skyliner '55 revealed another fun trick, cleaning up easily (and beautifully) from the guitar's volume control, enabling great plug-and-play capabilities for the straight-in player.

Ball relates that this particular amp "seems like it would be a good choice for a jazz player looking for vintage tone", and indeed it would be, but I find it even more adept at raw rock 'n' roll, and had a real blast applying it as such. So, a nifty looker, a surprisingly robust performer, and likely to be the only true 'suitcase amp' onstage at your next show.

The Skyliner '55 recreates the circuit of a 1955 Harvard 5F10, and packs more than a few pleasant surprises in terms of volume and headroom

READER BOARDS

As guitarist in the Fabulous Bayside Blues Band **COLIN 'SHAKEY' HOWELL** has carefully honed his perfect pedalboard. Here it is...

KIT LIST

Colin Howell

- **PEDALS IN ORDER**
  Shure GLX wireless receiver, Xotic EP Booster, Dunlop 95Q Cry Baby switchless wah, TC Electronic PolyTune 2, Xotic SP Compressor, Mesa/Boogie Tone-Burst, J Rockett Allan Holdsworth OD/Boost, Strymon DIG (with remote favourite switch), Strymon Flint
- **PATCH CABLES**
  Fender and Evidence Audio Monorail solderless custom patch cables
- **POWER SUPPLY**
  Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 4x4
- **BOARD TYPE**
  Pedaltrain Classic JR

What inspired this set-up?
"My main band, The Fabulous Bayside Blues Band, and the material we do. The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Billy D, Keb' Mo', etc. Clean slide is needed on some songs and, working with a singer who plays acoustic guitar and harp, I didn't want to overpower him with masses of loud distortion. Clean, and sometimes thick clean, was what I wanted. I can't get on with Les Pauls, despite owning five of them over the years, so pedals that thicken up single coils were the answer."

Tell us a little about the journey...
"Being an echo junkie has played a huge part in choosing the right pedals. The echo pedals had to be the best available. I use a Strymon BlueSky [reverb] for recording, and that is awesome. But it's not essential live as long as I have something, as my Morgan amp has no reverb. The Strymon Flint has reverb and an incredible tremolo, which is the only other effect I ever use. I have tried endless distortion pedals – Tube Screamers, a Fulltone OCD, Suhr Riot, Mesa/Boogie Flux-Drive, Bogner Wessex, etc etc. But I never switched any of them on live, so there was ultimately no point in having them. The Xotic EP Booster is tucked away at the back of my pedalboard, as I love the tone of it so much. It's on all the time and I therefore don't need to access it as easily as all my other pedals."

Is there a pedal you'd like to add?
"I have been through so many over the last few years I think I have exhausted most of the possibilities. The facility GuitarGuitar offer to easily trade pedals has been a huge help in formulating what seems to be the ideal pedalboard set-up for me with this band. The Holdsworth was the last one I bought, and I use it as a two-stage clean boost with the gain turned off altogether. The Mesa/Boogie Tone-Burst, I traded at GuitarGuitar and then bought it back again. It's probably my favourite pedal of all time, despite never getting on with their amps."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?
"A Morgan RCA35 head with a Bogner 1x12 cab, and a Roland Cube-80XL. My main guitar is a James Trussart Steelcaster, but I also use a 2015 Fender Custom Shop 20th Anniversary Relic Strat, a PRS 513, a G&L Tribute ASAT Classic Bluesboy for slide and an Ozark brass thinline resonator for slide."

What lessons have you learned along the way?
"Choose pedals you love the tone of on their own and avoid situations where any pedal in a chain needs adjusting on the fly, as the interaction between two or more pedals can be a nightmare live. Try to have at least two clean preset boost levels available. Don't clog your board up with pedals you hardly ever use."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, email the details and an image to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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Graham Sloan

- **PRS MODEL** Brent Mason Signature
- **BANDS** The Riffreshers (www.theriffreshers.co.uk)
- **MAIN AMPS & PEDALS USED** Mesa/Boogie TriAxis, Mesa/Boogie 2:Ninety power amp, Thiele ported 200W EV cabs, Mesa/Boogie Mark V, TC Electronic and Rocktron rack effects; pedalboard loaded with Fulltone, TC Electronic, Hilton Electronics pedals & Dunlop 535Q Cry Baby Wah, Wampler Ego Compressor, Brent Mason Hot Wired OD & Latitude Tremolo, Keeley Compressor, JHS AT
- **GIGS SO FAR** Numerous, including Glasgow City Chambers, Royal Concert Hall (Glasgow), Lochgreen Hotel (Troon), Kildonan House (Arran), Sorn Castle

TEST PILOTS
PRS BRENT MASON

Now **GRAHAM SLOAN** has had some time to get to know it, we find out if the Brent Mason is setting the right tone for his band, The Riffreshers

Since my first report on this fine instrument model back in August, it has been tested at a wide range of gigs. First and foremost, it has done countless shows with my own band, The Riffreshers, playing to some wonderful audiences over the length and breadth of bonnie Scotland.

The venues we've played include Glasgow City Chambers, Lochgreen House (Troon), Kildonan Hotel (Arran) and Sorn Castle (Ayrshire). Thanks to its wide-ranging flexibility, I've also used the PRS when depping with other bands – Cruise, The Houseband and Waterfront, for example. You'd expect such versatility from this guitar, given that it was developed to suit the needs of one of Nashville's premier sessioneers, the go-to guitarist for the likes of Shania Twain, Alan Jackson, Vince Gill, Chet Atkins, Brad Paisley, Dolly Parton and Reba McEntire.

The Brent Mason continues to play beautifully, settling into my preferred .009-042 string gauge. I've managed to adjust to its bolt-on Pattern maple neck, which is not quite as chunky as the Wide Fat neck profile of my PRS Swamp Ash Special, nor as slim as the Wide Thin neck profile of my PRS Custom 24.

"I've tended to use the single-coil options more frequently than the humbucking ones"

As I mentioned in my first report, we're certainly in Fender-style territory when it comes to tone, with the five-way selector switch enabling you to dial in some classic sounds. My particular favourites on this guitar are positions two and four. But while the Brent Mason delivers a broad range of very usable tones, I wonder if it could be improved by incorporating an option that allows you to use the neck and bridge pickups together in both humbucker and single-coil modes; then it would be able to offer additional Telecaster-like tones. The five-way selector switch has itself taken some getting used to as – unlike a Stratocaster's – it sits behind the volume control.

I've tended to use the single-coil options more frequently than the humbucking ones but there isn't huge variation in tone or volume when moving between humbucking and single-coil modes; as you'd expect, there's some added thickness and the 'bucker tones are slightly fatter than the single-coil sounds on offer.

Next time, I'll report on how the guitar handled gigs over the busy festive period, and some much-anticipated recording sessions.

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John Hassall

Libertines bassist and April Rainers main man picks his favourite records

Now living in the Danish city of Aarhus, John Hassall released his first album with new band John Hassall & The April Rainers, *Wheels To Idyll*, in February. It followed 2015's Libertines comeback record *Anthems For Doomed Youth* and last year's triumphant world tour with his old bandmates Pete Doherty, Carl Barat and Gary Powell. His new band are on tour in the UK from 2-11 March.

The Beatles
SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND

"I'm such a big Beatles fan, The Beatles are almost like my religion. All of my other music, every other album I own, is measured against The Beatles. *Sgt. Pepper's* probably doesn't have the best Beatles songs *per se*, but the vibe of the album is off the scale – the optimism and the good atmosphere. It's my favourite album."

The La's
THE LA'S

"The arrangements on this album are just brilliant. They're up there with the great guitar bands of all time. That album has always really inspired me, because you hear about how they never gave up, through recording it three times, until through perseverance they achieved their perfect album. The parts are so good, they bring out the songs as the best they can be."

Buffalo Springfield
BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD

"It's a great psychedelic country album that sounds as if The Beatles had been brought up in Texas. It's got really cool pop songs, but also an American country vibe. They've got it all – the songs, they look cool and Neil Young's the lead guitar player, which is not a bad thing! There's really nice guitar playing on it. In fact, I prefer Buffalo Springfield to Neil Young's solo work."

Donovan
DONOVAN'S GREATEST HITS

"I'd choose Donovan's greatest hits because for me he's more of a singles than albums person. I remember hearing him on *Sounds Of The 60s* when I was a teenager, and thinking, 'Who is this guy?' and going down to Our Price, ordering his greatest hits and being fascinated by his fantasy world. I think he's underrated as a songwriter and never got the credit he was due."

The Move
MOVEMENTS

"This is a compilation album that's got pretty much everything on it. They had a sort of Birmingham melancholy psychedelic vibe, which for some reason resonated with me as a teenager growing up in London in the 90s. Roy Wood at his best could have been Lennon and McCartney on an off day. He's a great songwriter."

Billy Nicholls
WOULD YOU BELIEVE

"I've only just heard about Billy. He did just one album, and had The Small Faces as his backing band and John Paul Jones on bass. He was quite fortunate to be in a very creatively good space bang in the middle of 1967 and having this amazing band with him. It's an incredible album, with Andrew Loog Oldham producing it. I just love that whole colourful psychedelic landscape."

The Incredible String Band
THE HANGMAN'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER

"I found this in my dad's record collection. I listened to it and my emotions went from hilarity to anger and then to awe when I realised all this chaotic, anarchic folk-pop with 10-minute songs and out-of-tune vocals was meant to be like that, and it's really inspired songwrititing. Really groundbreaking stuff, creatively in that idiom. But they're still holding on to some kind of pop sensibility."

Odessey & Oracle
THE ZOMBIES

"Yet another psychedelic album from the mid-60s. I was really inspired by its success story. They got dropped by their label and funded it themselves. They hadn't had a hit for about five years, but they believed so much in the road they'd chosen. It was the first album recorded in Abbey Road after *Sgt. Pepper*, so they must have had a lot of cosmic powers around the mixing desk."

Django Reinhardt
THE INTÉGRALE DJANGO REINHARDT VOL 5

"This is the only album that isn't from the 60s here. He's singing with Freddie Taylor, and it makes it even more pop, which I like. Django's playing is really joyful and you find that joy in his msuic. I don't think there's anything better than to have a whiskey and a cigar and listen to some Django. We're all big Django fans in The Libertines and he's a huge influence on my new band."

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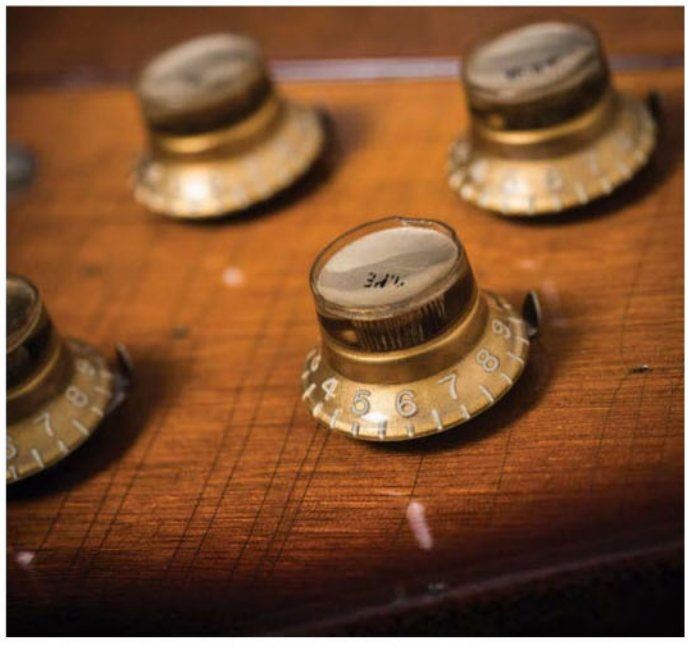
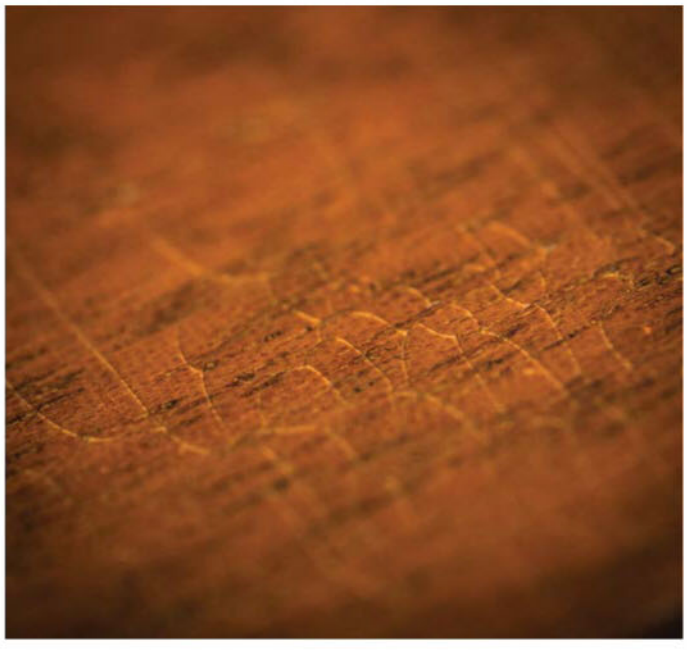
The Money Shot

If guitar shopping is at the forefront of your mind – let's face it, if it isn't then you are probably reading the wrong magazine – then we recommend marking 16 March in your diary, as that's the date scheduled for the next Gardiner Houlagte guitar auction in Corsham, Wiltshire. Regular readers and subscribers to our YouTube channel (youtube.com/theguitarmagazine) will remember the gorgeous '62 Jazzmaster and '66 Tele that we showcased last time around. Our pick from the latest catalogue is this 1963 Gibson Firebird III that, despite missing a functioning vibrato, is achingly cool with a dreamily playable neck shape and searing mini-humbucker blues-rock tones in spades. Head to guitar-auctions.co.uk to be led into temptation...





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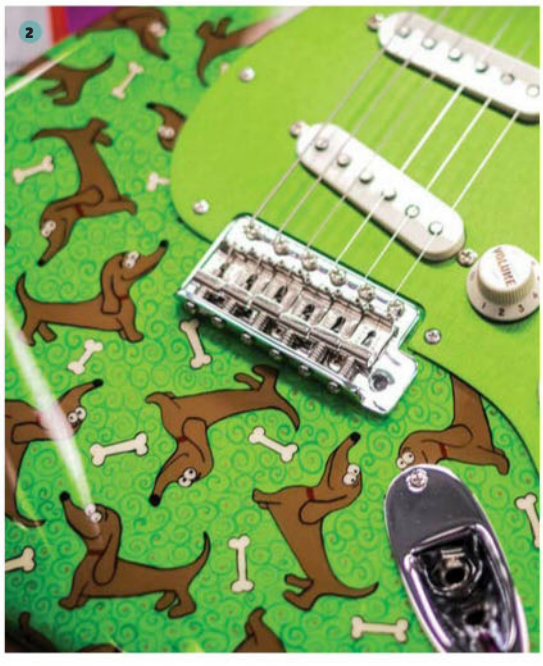
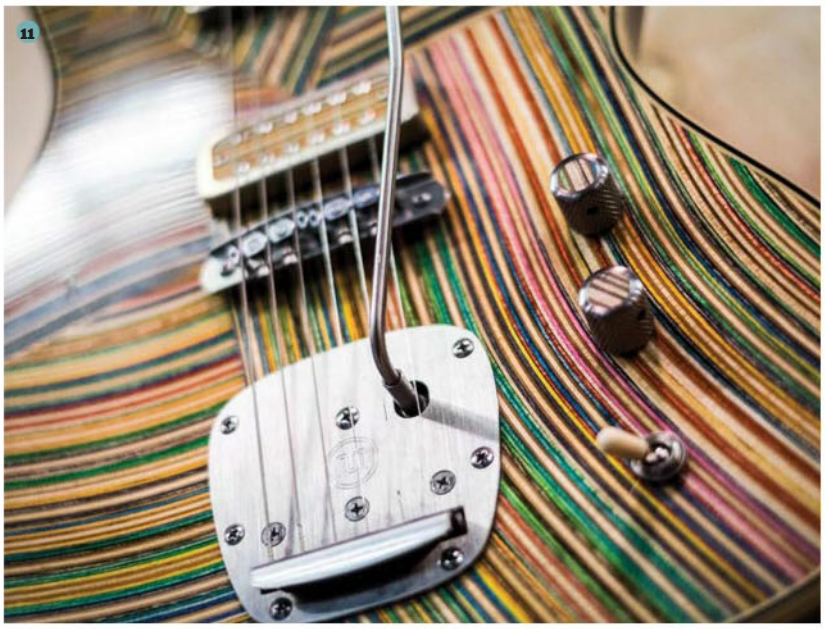
CALIFORNIA LOVE

Although the weather in Anaheim in late January was frequently closer to what you might expect to encounter on a fishing trawler in the Southern Atlantic, the sun at least came out to play for long enough to take the customary convention centre photograph. And as you might expect from the biggest event in the Musical Instrument Industry's calendar, there was no shortage of hot new gear in the building...

Photography **Joe Supple & Chris Vinnicombe**



1 & **4** Eastman Guitars impressed with its high-quality and extraordinarily vibey Antique Varnish series. Every guitar in the range proved to be very difficult to put down. Potential giant killers? Read our review soon. **2** **7** & **8** It wouldn't be The NAMM Show without some jaw-dropping creations from the Fender Custom Shop. The Wiener Dog Strat NOS, Master Built by Todd Krause, was a contender for many people's 'best in show'. **3** Guild's T-Bird ST P90 in Pelham Blue; super-sleek retro-cool. **5** & **6** The Gretsch revolution continues to impress with thoughtfully recreated Vintage Select Jet models and new Center Block Broadkasters with String-Thru Bigsby vibratos. **9** New Fano TC6 in NOS Olympic White.



10 & **11** Prisma Guitars, handmade from recycled skateboards and loaded with McNelly pickups. **12** Gibson's Johnny A/Joe Bonamassa Spruce Top, inspired by Bonamassa's '59 EMS-1235 double-neck. **13** Charvel does stripped-down and hot-rod all at once with the new ash-bodied Pro-Mod San Dimas Style 2 HH HT. **14** & **16** Supro guitars are back! Just add spring reverb and a fuzzbox for instant garage-blues heaven from this Americana Series Sahara model with a chambered mahogany body and newly developed 'Acousti-glass' top. **15** **17** & **18** Godin's new-for-NAMM models may be the company's most desirable ever. We love the Gretsch-inspired 5th Avenue and Montreal Premiere LTDs and the Gold Foil-toting Summit Classic Supreme. **19** Josh Smith and Pete Thorn: we are not worthy!

15

16

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ORANGE
ACOUSTIC
TREBLE
BASS
GAIN
TREBLE
BASS

21

22
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24
TAP RATIO
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ON-NO DRY
ON
OFF
TRAILS
RUBBERNECK ANALOG DELAY

23
CabDryVR
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20 Along with new Rocker amps (see youtube.com/theguitarmagazine for demos) Orange also launched the world's first stereo valve acoustic preamp/active DI and a new compressor pedal, the Kongpressor. **21** Another 'world first' from GTC Sound Innovations, the Revpad is a "wireless touchpad FX controller and ultra-dynamic sound processor that turns any guitar into a smart guitar". Review coming soon! **22** The Phil Jones Bass Quantum 400: huge sound, tiny box. **23** & **24** A cab sim, feedbacker and fully-featured delay from the DigiTech stable. **25** Two-Rock's wide-panel tweed-influenced Burnside. **26** Blackstar's ace Fly 3 now comes with Bluetooth. **27** Sumptuous 6V6 sounds from Bad Cat's USA Player Series. **28** PRS + John Mayer = killer playing and tones.

29 CEO Chris Martin with CF Martin & Co's two-millionth guitar – an extraordinary work of art that incorporates an actual watch into the design. **30** **34** & **35** The new Taylor Guitars Academy Series guitars, complete with comfortable arm-rests, were ably demonstrated by Master Luthier Andy Powers alongside the company's GS Mini Bass, which comes equipped with custom bass strings with a nylon core and phosphor-bronze wrap wire developed by D'Addario. **31** Avian Guitars made a big splash at NAMM with updated models for 2017 – look out for much more in the mag soon. **32** **33** & **36** The parlor guitar trend shows no sign of slowing down: here are cute and toneful examples from Fender, Art & Lutherie and Guild.

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SHOW AND TELL

Winter NAMM wasn't the only musical instrument show in Southern California in January 2017. The weekend of 21-22 also saw the SoCal World Guitar Show take place in Costa Mesa, 20 minutes south of Anaheim. Amongst the smorgasbord of vintage guitar gear on display was a selection of instruments owned by none other than Joe Bonamassa, including Eldon Shamblin's '54 Strat. Bonamassa himself was on hand to meet and greet the public and even indulge in a little gear trading...

Photography **Jason Hunt**

1952
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ELDON'S
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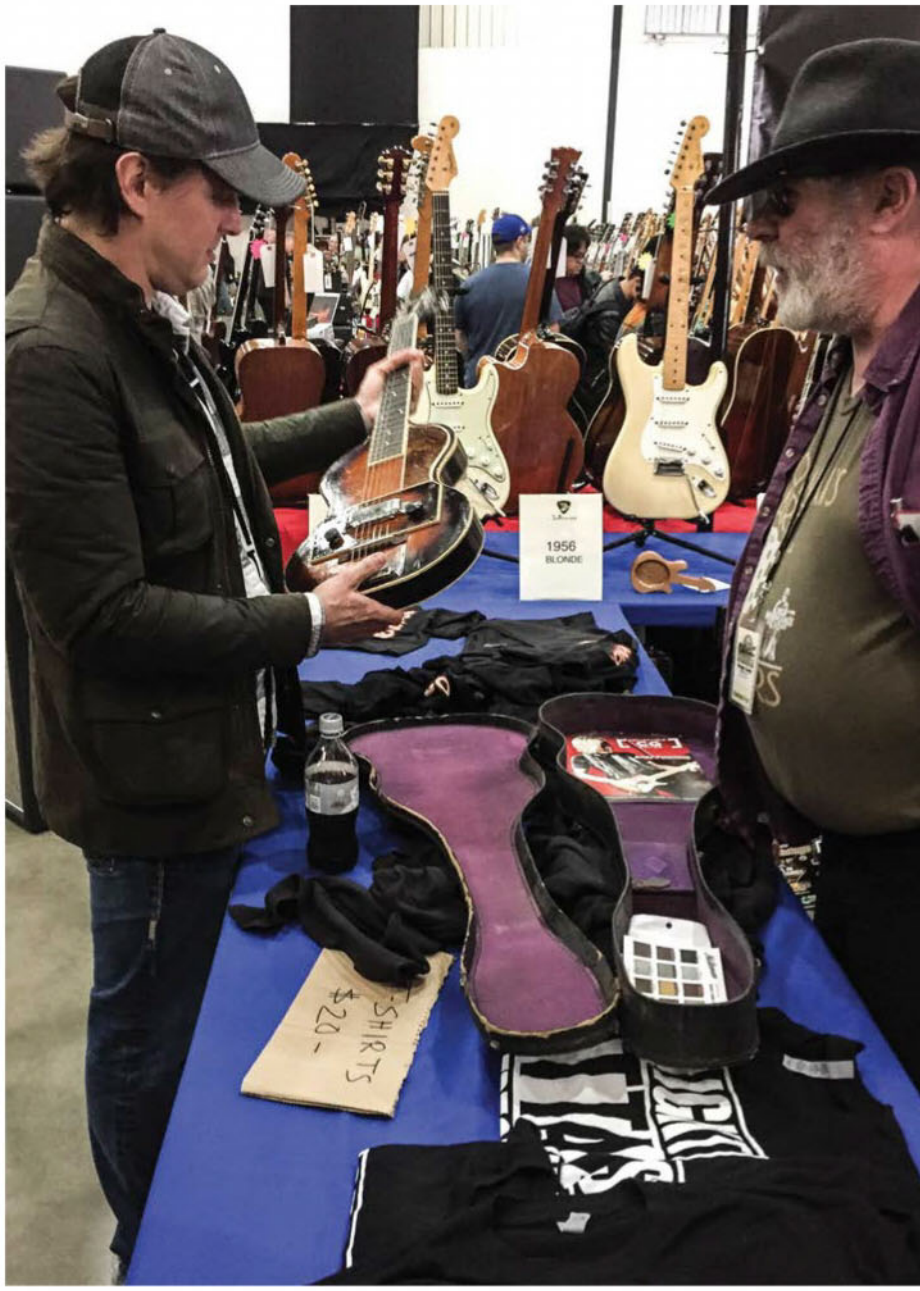
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The War Of The Rosewood

Some have speculated that recent CITES changes may spell the end for rosewood in the manufacture of affordable guitars. *Dave Hunter* helps you see the wood from the trees

Beloved for its use in the fingerboards of all types of guitars; the sides, backs and bridges of acoustics; and several decorative elements, rosewood has long been one of the most revered woods in all of instrument making. But the trade in this prized tonewood just got a lot more restrictive. To find out what this means to many of the largest American guitar makers in particular, and to the overseas customers who buy their instruments, let's unravel some of the fine print within these new international rules.

Most guitarists who dabble in either vintage or 'boutique' electric and acoustic guitars have long been aware of existing restrictions on the trade in Brazilian rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*), and their implications on efforts to import or export instruments containing that prized species of tonewood. In the most recent meeting of the parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in September and October 2016, however, this group overseeing worldwide protection of endangered plants and animals agreed to place all species

24 5/8
Brazil

of rosewood (both the genus *Dalbergia* and *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, the latter also called 'African rosewood'), as well as three species of bubinga, under Appendix II protections as of 2 January 2017 (Brazilian rosewood has long been listed on the even stricter Appendix I).

The brief translation: any rosewood or bubinga crossing international borders for commercial purposes will need the correct certificate to do so. Beyond that, though, this considerable tightening of the international trade in rosewood might have major implications on how any guitar maker aspiring to international sales perceives this formerly ubiquitous timber.

Any rosewood or bubinga crossing international borders for commercial purposes will need the correct certificate to do so

It's worth noting here that the new CITES restrictions have not been inspired specifically by the use of rosewood and bubinga in musical instrument manufacturing – a relative minority user of these species in the grand scheme of things – but by the greatly increasing demand for high-end rosewood furniture manufactured in China. As Jack Higginbotham, chief operating officer for Paul Reed Smith Guitars, points out: "As a matter of fact, per the CITES website, Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival."

In other words, let's work toward ensuring sustainability now, so we don't have to move the rest of the rosewood species to far stricter Appendix I protections along with Brazilian rosewood.

News of these new restrictions has also worried many players who might intend to travel with rosewood-bearing instruments merely for private use (for the sake of brevity, I'll use 'rosewood' from here on out, with the understanding that the bubinga species *Guibourtia demeusei*, *Guibourtia pellegriniana*, and *Guibourtia tessmannii* are also affected, but are seen less frequently in guitar making). We've all heard the horror stories of guitarists' instruments carrying Brazilian rosewood having been seized at borders in the past, so clearly the development raises a few pertinent questions, such as:

Are my own private guitars with rosewood parts now considered 'contraband'?

and:

Will I need a certificate for any guitar with rosewood parts that I intend to tour or travel with?

Fortunately, the answers to both of those questions are pretty simple, and largely benign. According to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, non-commercial items of less than 10kg (22lbs) that "include gifts, items not intended for sale that are carried in personal baggage or as part of a household move, and items that are personally owned and shipped to oneself" are exempt from restrictions. Guitars that do not meet the requirements of this exemption "must be accompanied by CITES documents when traded internationally".

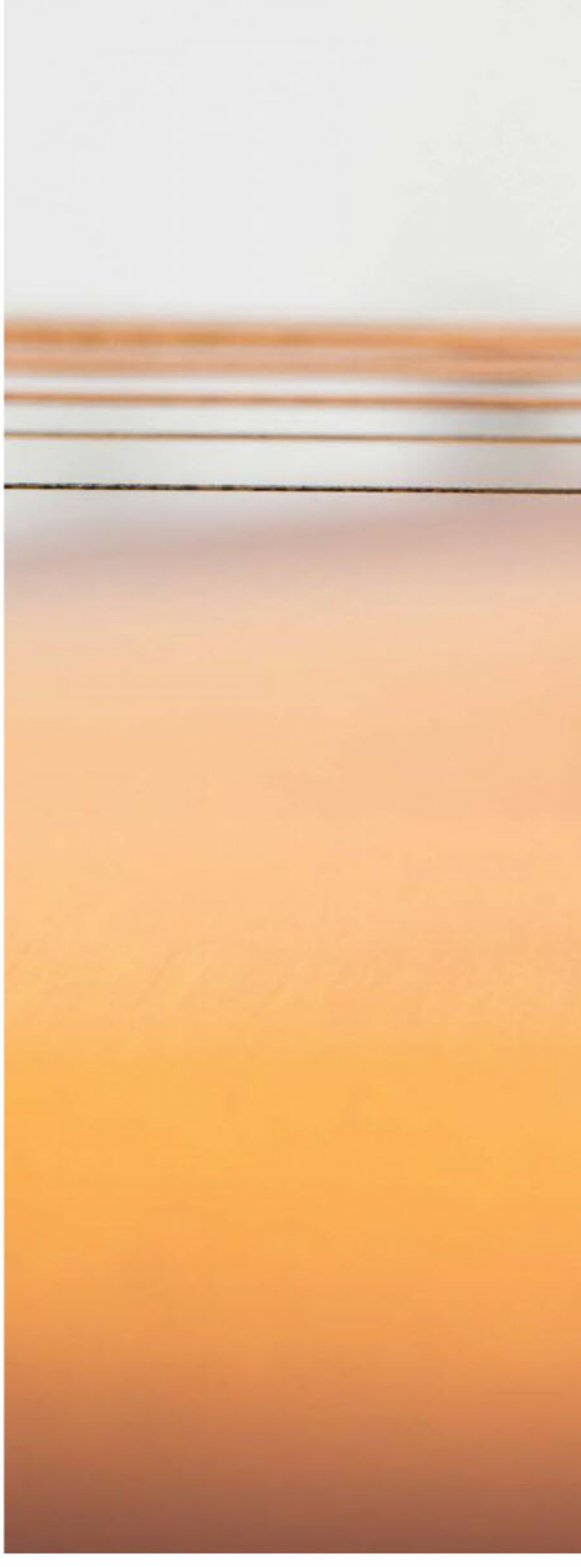
Note that such restrictions are relevant only when items are exported or imported across trade borders: shipping within the EU, for example, or within the United States, should not require CITES certification.

So that's good news for traveling or touring guitarists, and alleviates the fear of having guitars taken by customs officials when you're carrying your instruments purely for private use.

The new CITES rules do still have major implications for the guitar trade, however, and are certainly pertinent today when so much individual purchasing is done direct from overseas makers and retailers, and even private individuals via listing sites such as eBay and Reverb, in addition to the official exports that the large American guitar makers send in bulk to their British and European distributors. Private sellers who wish to export

LEE ANDERTON, ANDERTONS

"The EU has taken a more heavy-handed approach than CITES suggested. Not only does the exporter have to generate a licence, but the importer has to apply for a licence from their local agency. Instruments that are travelling to be repaired are also classed as commercial shipments and are subject to the same rules. With Chapman Guitars, we made the decision to discontinue rosewood on all of our guitars. I think this is the end for rosewood on sub £1,000 guitars."



a guitar out of the United States can fill out an application for a CITES certificate with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, pay the required single-item fee of $100, and expect to receive the documentation necessary to get that guitar across international borders within 60 to 90 days. Dealers or private sellers who expect to do a lot of international trade can purchase a blanket three-year certification for $200, plus $5 per individual guitar shipped.

In addition to this export documentation, however, some countries also require import documentation, so sellers will need to understand the regulations on a country-by-country basis.

Do these tightened restrictions represent an early signal of the end of the use of rosewood?

It's all very doable, but certainly adds a level of bureaucracy that most manufacturers would prefer to avoid. And that in itself might constitute a significant rethinking of the supply and sales chains for the likes of Fender, Gibson, PRS, Taylor, Martin and others, who are clearly wedged between many players' expectations of having rosewood components on several classic styles of acoustic and electric guitar, and CITES escalating efforts to control the trade in this timber. Given the increased complications to free trade, do these tightened restrictions represent an early signal of the eventual end of the use of rosewood in guitar making?

Fender EVP Richard McDonald tells *G&B*: "We have every intention of continuing to use rosewood. The new requirements require export permits from the exporting country's management authority, and some countries require import permits. While these requirements result in us investing additional time and resources co-ordinating all of the permits, we're prepared to do so, and have been doing so for months."

Higginbotham presents a similar stance for Maryland-based maker PRS: "We have >

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Rivolta GUITARS

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Gibson has previously used baked maple and Richlite as substitutes for rosewood and ebony

developed a robust compliance program and are capable to comply with all laws while continuing to source, purchase, manufacture, and sell finished goods containing *Dalbergia* species. So while we are constantly finding and testing new species of wood, this regulation will not be the impetus for PRS changing its product designs."

Taylor, America's largest acoustic maker, indicates, however, that this tightening of CITES regulations certainly inspires a re-evaluation of how and where endangered species are used in its manufacturing.

"Taylor will certainly not use rosewood on any guitars in lower price ranges that need to be exported from the US," company co-founder Bob Taylor tells us. "This is for the benefit of dealers and players. Taylor can permit an entire container with one permit, but sooner or later an owner may have to permit just one guitar, and the cost and effort are significant."

"For example," Taylor continues, "just making guitars with a single rosewood accent piece, like a head plate veneer, causes it to be a CITES-regulated guitar. But even more, guitars with sides and backs of rosewood also have to be considered. We'll reserve the cost and work required to obtain permits for the higher-end models with solid rosewood backs and sides."

> Taylor's response to the restrictions begs the question: is it time to devote more attention to the use of alternative wood species?

Even if several makers intend to continue using rosewood where we've traditionally seen it – on fingerboards, the backs and sides of some high-end acoustic models, headstock facings, flat-top bridges, skunk stripes and marquetry – Taylor's response to the new restrictions inevitably begs the question: is it time to devote more attention to the use of alternative wood species in guitar making?

Having long been known for promoting alternative and sustainable timbers, however, Taylor's response is not entirely surprising. "Taylor had already begun to make these moves long before rosewood was uplisted to CITES 2 [the Appendix II protections described above]," Bob says. "One example >

JAMES, FORSYTHS MUSIC

"We'll likely see a move away from rosewood in cheaper instruments, particularly given India and Indonesia are currently opting out altogether, which makes short-term purchasing from those countries impossible. I don't see slowing down the consumption of endangered woods as a bad thing, but it's frustrating that Indian rosewood, which accounts for the bulk of rosewood in the MI industry is not particularly endangered and seems to have been included largely for ease of monitoring. It will also be interesting to see if ebony is added to the list, which I believe is a possibility in the next CITES review in 2019."

DOUG CLUNIE, CODA MUSIC

"Big companies seem to have everything in place when it comes to shipping stuff from the US. It's taking a wee bit longer with the boutique guys. Some of them have master certificates in place, some not, some people have stocks of wood that are so old that it's pretty much impossible to get it certified, so that stuff will stay in the US. With some builders, we're switching the boards over to ziricote, ebony or pau ferro."

is our maple 600 Series guitars, which we redesigned a couple of years ago to make them more appealing to players. The biggest reason we did this was to take pressure off traditional tropical tonewoods. And, yes, we will increase our use of these domestic woods as we are completely ready to do so."

It might be easier for a company such as Taylor, founded on original designs, to sway customers toward alternative woods, but many makers wrestle with guitarists' expectations of finding wood types used on specific classic models: a 1963 Fender Strat reissue just isn't seen as accurate without a rosewood fingerboard. Even so, Fender isn't restricting its sourcing to traditional woods alone, and sees the need to work within a changing environment supply-wise.

"We always look at new and alternative materials for our products to maintain or improve performance and/or sustainability," says McDonald. "We will not use materials

Bob Taylor says that the company will "certainly not" use rosewood on lower-priced guitars for the export market

unless we are confident that we can obtain sufficient supply." To that end, McDonald says Fender "offer many alternatives for players that prefer not to buy rosewood products. We absolutely support responsible harvesting and distribution of timber species, including the CITES requirements. It's important to monitor and understand materials' sustainability. At this point, it's about control and tracking to create a more informed global awareness."

To an extent, that "more informed global awareness" defines one other challenge for many guitar makers, which is try to shift customers – as and when necessary – to a greater receptiveness of guitars made with woods other than those found on 'golden age' creations of the 50s and 60s, and to simultaneously ensure that these alternative woods aren't perceived as 'inferior'.

"PRS has not conducted any official research," says Higginbotham, "but I think there is plenty of information out there to support that a good number of players are accepting of alternative materials. That said, I am sure there are some people who are very particular about what they play, collect, and purchase as well."

By way of a 'big picture' conclusion, Bob Taylor suggests that the best response to these new CITES rules is not simply to turn away from one wood and adopt another, but to accept a global approach to genuine sustainability for all tonewood species. "Without planting and sustainable use, no wood is safe. This is why Taylor has already begun planting wood... and India has been involved with planting rosewood for some time, so we must realise and respect that. I believe that guitar woods can be grown, and these truths must be able to co-operate with new laws, and vice versa." Taylor continues: "This new CITES ruling will certainly help Taylor move away from the use of rosewood, but that's not the path to a solution. If a company like Taylor, or a country like India, is swept up in a large law like this, then we still haven't gotten it right as a world. We have to keep trying to become sustainable. The value in this ruling, for me, is not to turn away from rosewood, even though it will have that effect in many ways, but rather to cause Taylor to re-double our current planting and alternative wood projects, and also try hard to convince others that without replanting we are all going to fail. This ruling can give all rosewood species a rest while we work out the future. Consider this: ivory is on the strictest worldwide ban that humans have been able to devise, and yet each year more and more elephants are slaughtered. My point is that we as people cannot go back to our lives thinking everything is great just because lawmakers made a law. Without each of our involvement to change things, it won't change. We can't leave it to others. For me, I've dedicated my remaining years to planting tonewoods around the world. And one day guitars will be made from these trees."

> "I've dedicated my remaining years to planting tonewoods. One day guitars will be made from these trees"
>
> **BOB TAYLOR**

VOX

How I got started...

Andy Fairweather Low

From being inspired by the Stones as a youth to working with Bill Wyman, via success with Amen Corner and rubbing shoulders with Hendrix, Clapton and The Who, *G&B* hears Andy Fairweather Low's unique story

Story **David Gallant**

"I got persuaded to go and see The Rolling Stones on a package bill in Cardiff by one of my school friends and that was it," starts Andy Fairweather Low. "It was 28 February, 1964, and the only reason I know that is because I am working with Bill Wyman a lot and he keeps a record of everything. I mentioned that particular gig and he didn't remember the gig, but lo and behold he showed me the poster and the setlist! It started off with Chuck Berry's *I'm Talking About You* – and that was my recollection, and my recollection was correct! It made a big impact. That was one of those life-changing moments. It got to me – like a virus!"

After seeing the Stones, the next thing that overwhelmed Low was Stax and Atlantic Records. "Booker T, Otis Redding, who I saw live twice, Sam & Dave... that whole thing about how to structure a rhythm section, how to get a drum sound... The MGs were the rhythm section for me, and still are I might add! Even today when we're in the studio and we're saying, 'We want that sound', and we want to do that... It's great to chase it, but you're not going to get there. But even if you fail, when it's set that high and you fail, it's still OK."

Fairweather Low also remembers going to see bands such as Georgie Fame & The Blue Flames and Zoot Money and his Big Roll Band. "*In The Midnight Hour* by Wilson Pickett had just come out, and two days later Zoot Money or Georgie Fame would be playing it at a little club in Cardiff. That was magical. I was just wrapped up in this self-belief of, 'This is what I have got to do'."

At this time, Fairweather Low desperately wanted a guitar: "My parents had sort of looked around to get one. We lived on a council estate and the person who was in charge of all the Christmas presents for the people in our street, and maybe the next three streets, ran off with the money – so I never got that. And that would have been a big year. I could have been a contender if I'd had it that year!"

Eventually, Fairweather Low ended up getting a Saturday job at the Barratts of Manchester music shop in Cardiff, hired by fellow Welsh luminary Dave Edmunds who worked at the store. "It was there that I first picked up a guitar. I just couldn't stop. It was like a candy store. I got to play and borrow loads of different guitars. Thankfully, there were no computers like today, where kids just use them for games. Well, my computer was the guitar – I was really focused on that.

"When I started, I got myself a Höfner Verithin, although the Futurama was the one I wanted. That was going to be acquired when the money came in! Anyway, I had the Verithin and I auditioned for this band called the Taff Beats – we all lived in the Taff valley. The guitarist, Walter Morris, had a Bird amplifier and we all plugged in to that and it wasn't long before I was the lead guitar player. Then, in 1965, I moved on to another band – the Sect Maniacs.

"I had a fantastic white Stratocaster that I put through a Vox AC30 amp with a treble booster, which boosted the treble to a height where you could cut through corrugated iron! The only problem was that this booster stood four inches into the air, and inevitably it eventually got snapped off. But they were fabulous valve amplifiers – I just loved that natural sound, and I would take it to the point where it was nearly breaking." Sadly, the white Strat got stolen: "That was a very sad day. Nicked out of the back of the van outside the roadie's house. Thankfully, I was able to replace it with another borrowed Strat from Barratts."

By late-65, Fairweather Low had moved on again, this time to Amen Corner. "We didn't spend too much time in Cardiff," he recalls. "Funnily enough, we got offered a gig in Bournemouth at the Winter Gardens, and one of the bands that was on the bill, The Lonely Ones, recommended us to their agency. And their agency then phoned up and said, 'If you come up we can give you this amount of work'. They had some dancehalls that they used to run, and we played them, and from that moment on it was, 'Right, well you need to move to London'. So we all moved into The Madison, a hotel in Sussex Gardens. Seven of us in a room down in the basement.

"There was so much work around the UK, but there weren't enough bands to fill it, 'cos you could do, certainly at the weekends, three gigs in a night. You see, there were all-nighters then. Not many, but enough. Nottingham, Derby and certainly London as well... so you could do a Mayfair, then flip over to a Top Rank and then find yourself at 12.30am humping your gear down some narrow staircase to do an all-nighter.

"We had a residency at The Speakeasy. We also played Blazes, but we never played The Bag O' Nails or The Flamingo. I went to The Flamingo in 1966 and saw John >

"I remember being in The Bag O' Nails after a gig and bumping into John Lennon. We toured with Hendrix, Pink Floyd, The Move..."

Mayall's Bluesbreakers. My first sighting of Eric Clapton with the sideboards and the Les Paul. Fabulously exciting moments."

Turning the Corner

Fairweather Low will always be remembered for his extraordinarily clear and toneful high-pitched voice. "I remember we used to do a lot of BBC radio and there was *The Joe Loss Pop Show* that would be on kind of a lunchtime, and I would be on with the band Amen Corner and play *Bend Me Shape Me* or whatever it was. The next week, the Joe Loss band would play the number without me or the band being there and they would always have a woman to sing. Whichever Amen Corner song they did, a woman would sing it – never a man. I've learnt to live with that now... I'm in good shape with the voice and I'm managing a little better since I gave up smoking in 1971."

So how did Amen Corner move on? "Bad decisions, that's how we did it! Ron King, who was a partner with Don Arden in Galaxy Entertainment, separated from Don and formed his own agency and we were part of that. That's the level of management we were in. And he decided that we were going to be successful. They worked at making us successful. And we were! Amen Corner was on the road... that's how we lived. We got money from our gigs and that paid our bills. But we got none of the royalties. What we got out of it was that we became successful and we loved it.

"I remember being in The Bag O' Nails one night after a gig and bumping into John Lennon. We toured with Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, The Move, The Nice, you know? We were on the same bill. One night at The Speakeasy, Jimi got up and played bass with us. He wanted to play *I Can't Turn Me Loose*, so he took the bass over and we played it. Another time, at about 2.30 in the morning, he asked if he could play guitar... so he got up and played the guitar.

"You know, it's funny, because I tell it like I'm telling a lie, but these things did happen. It was Amen Corner for goodness sake – it's like ridiculous. And I'm in New York and I get a call from the guy who was semi-managing us at the time, and he knew Jimi and he knew Mike Jeffries, etc... and I get asked to go down and sing on a re-cut that Jimi was doing of *Stone Free* in the studio. I went down there and lo and behold Roger Chapman [Family] was there as well, so both of us were in there – two distinct voices, can I say? So we were both singing backing vocals on a re-cut of *Stone Free* and it was really good."

Back in the UK, Amen Corner's *(If Paradise Is) Half as Nice* was a big hit, but things weren't going so well with the band's management. "Our contract for the management, agency and recording was all on one bit of paper," says Fairweather Low. "Ron had sold us to Don, and Don sold us to Andrew Alden and now Andrew Alden was going into liquidation... and of course they took everything financially from it that they could. So Amen Corner would get passed on to EMI or whoever would buy it.

"Our way of getting out of this final piece of paper that had been passed round all these people was to finish Amen Corner. And I'm there thinking, 'I'm not enjoying this at all... I don't like these people and I don't like what's going on'. So we decided to keep the rhythm section together and we did a deal with RCA. And out of that deal, we managed to pay off the £15,000 that we owed to our landlord, and everyone else that we owed money to as well. So there you have it. And that was the day we started out with Fairweather."

Going solo

Fairweather went on to produce two albums (only one of which would come out in the UK) and two singles. "We were trucking round the country and there were five of us in the band and we had a Hammond organ. This was a big bone of contention. It takes

four people to carry a Hammond, so one of us would get a day off! And we're talking three flights of iron staircases to get into a club at the top of a building above a cinema. It wasn't really working out and after one of the gigs I said, 'Can you just drop me at Paddington? I'm going home 'cos I've had enough of this. I went back to Cardiff, and that must have been something like 1971/72 – and I've been here ever since!"

Fairweather Low continued, as he puts it, to "scribble a bit" and made some demos at Rockfield. "Then I got an audition offered to me by CBS, 'cos I'd been talking to various people and they said, 'Have a word with so-and-so', and so-and-so said, 'Come up to Whitfield Street, we'll record a few songs, then we'll see how we go'. So I recorded a few songs thinking, 'This could be it'. I wasn't really bothered about auditioning for anybody or anything... Well, apparently I passed the audition and the guy left the record company. And I thought, 'This is just sh...' and, 'What am I going to do now?'.

"Next thing I know is that I get a call from the guy who had left CBS, and he'd gone to A&M. And he recommended me to A&M and I got a deal with A&M. That was 1974 and the start of my three albums with A&M.

"For the first album, *Spider Jiving*, I went to San Francisco for three happy months, but it only took 12 days to record from beginning to end. We ended up doing nine days of recording the backing tracks in San Francisco and then three days in Nashville with some fabulous musicians, including The Memphis Horns, who had played with Otis."

For Fairweather Low's second album, *La Booga Rooga*, he "went out looking for people" and met up with producer Glynn Johns. "We got on immediately. In fact, of all the people that I've worked with, he is responsible for most of what I have ended up doing. That meeting and that album were phenomenal." *La Booga Rooga* spawned the single *Wide Eyed And Legless*. "I love that song and I do it now with our four-piece band, The Low Riders; I play acoustic guitar and Nick, our sax player, takes some gorgeous solos."

Third album *Bebop 'n' Holla* was finally finished and on its way for release in 1978. But punk had arrived and A&M had signed the Sex Pistols. "It was just the end of a type of music that I was playing. That album came out and there was me no more!"

Not quite! Over the last 40 or so years, Fairweather Low has collaborated with the likes of Eric Clapton, Bill Wyman, The Who... the list goes on. He's also been out on tour with The Low Riders, and he recently asked Denis Cornell to build him an 'inefficient amplifier'. "I wanted something simple that overloaded very easily, that had a volume and a tone knob and nothing else. It was against everything he stood for as an amplifier maker!"

Fairweather Low's main acoustic is a Martin 000 that fell out of the back of the tour van and got patched up with gaffer tape. "I spoke to Martin and got it fixed, and when I got it back I didn't like it, so I put the gaffer tape back on it and it sounded better!" His main electric was made by Gordon and Robert Wells at Knight Guitars. "It's just fabulous. Sound-wise, intonation-wise, it can be as dirty as you want and it can be clean, it's just got the lot. And I now own a Futurama, like the one I wanted – the same colour. My wife bought it for me a couple of years ago as a Christmas present. Now I have one, what I can't understand is that it is absolutely appalling!"

> "Now I own a Futurama, like the one I wanted. Now I have one, what I can't understand is that it is absolutely appalling!"

Firest★rters

Three albums in, with Thin Lizzy commitments behind them, Black Star Riders are forging their own identity. *G&B* meets the band...

Story **Michael Heatley** Live Photography **Mark Hylands**

The year of 2016 was a busy one for Scott Gorham, Damon Johnson and Ricky Warwick. The guitar-toting trio played a series of gigs under the Thin Lizzy banner to commemorate the 30th anniversary of iconic frontman Phil Lynott's death before returning to their alter ego of Black Star Riders – with a different rhythm section – to cut third album *Heavy Fire*.

Touring to promote the record's February release kicks off in the UK in March – their stronghold, as Californian Gorham, the elder statesman of the band at 65, acknowledges. "There's no question that the UK and parts of Scandinavia and Germany are our main markets. Japan's been good, but certainly the infrastructure is here." The long-time Lizzy stalwart is London-based, while the band's record label Nuclear Blast is German.

For *Heavy Fire*, Black Star Riders headed across the Atlantic to Tennessee to revive their relationship with producer Nick Raskulinecz, who has worked with the likes of Foo Fighters, Rush, Alice In Chains and Mastodon. Having already helmed second album *The Killer Instinct*, released in 2015, he had a handle on what BSR are all about – and, Johnson explains, became effectively the band's fourth axeman in a non-playing sense.

"Nick's got some great guitars. He's got a great old Flying V and a three-pickup SG we used a lot." His collection extends to amps, too. "On *The Killer Instinct*, Scott and I both brought some of our amps to the studio, but we ended up using Nick's. This time around, we didn't bother to bring in outside stuff, with the exception of one old Marshall 100-watt Super Lead.

"Scotty played this Bogner Shiva amp. Good tone, man! We had three or four speaker cabs to choose from, which made a huge difference. They had various configurations. One had Greenback 25s in, another 75s, and I think there was even a Mesa/Boogie on the wall; Nick brought out one of his old Dual Rectifiers."

For Gorham, "The cool thing is Nick knows how to use them all. If you want a certain sound, he will dial it in for you. It takes a lot of pain away. You're not sitting there for hours faffing about."

Raskulinecz wheeled out an old Orange amp head for Damon to try, with instant results. "As soon as he flipped it on I'd be, 'Wow, that sounds great, let's go with that'." The key, Johnson believes, is that "Nick not only has a clear understanding of what the band sounds like, he also knows us as individual players."

Singer and rhythm guitarist Warwick, who added his Telecaster to several tracks, likes working with Raskulinecz, "because I argue with him; he's not one of these 'You guys are amazing, you're brilliant, you've got everything, you've got the songs...'. He will push you until he's got the last drop of blood out of you. He's always trying to push us harder.

"We'd given him what I thought were 20 great ideas for songs and he said, 'No, I still need to hear another'. I got so mad I sat down and wrote this song, *Letting Go Of Me*, about him. It worked, because it got on the album. He tricked me into getting angry, picking up the guitar and writing the song, and that's the mark of a great producer – I won't fall for it next time!"

Warwick also gives Raskulinecz credit for the arrangement of *Heavy Fire*, a song >

Damon reveals the band "were not sure about at all. Nick stayed in it with us; we worked on it in pre-production, adding more parts, and finally Nick started taking parts out and the song came together in a great way." The addition of a breakdown/half-time section transformed a so-so song into not only a contender but also the album's impressive title track.

The producer challenged the band's preconceptions on a regular basis. Johnson reveals: "I'll be playing something and he'll ask Scott to play it, 'cos Scott is going to have a different swing with his right hand. Nobody's really precious about the actual performing of the parts. I even play a little bass on this record. I said to Robbie (Crane), 'I got this idea; why don't you play it a little like this?' and he said, 'Here, you play it, you record it – go!' Whatever sounds best for the song."

Yet even the best producer can go too far. Gorham recalls the line being drawn on the last album when Raskulinecz asked him to trade guitars with Johnson. "We looked at each other and said, 'What are you talking about? It's never gonna happen!'."

The band have morphed since Lizzy's reformation, from an Irish outfit with an American guitarist (Gorham) to an American band with an Irish singer, and Ricky Warwick is now a key figure in the Black Star Riders firmament. His lyrics have something of Lynott's widescreen vision about them, addressing subjects as diverse as gun control (*Who Rides The Tiger*) and international tensions (*Cold War Love*), as well as matters of the heart.

The compositional process starts with Warwick's lyrics. "I have riff ideas as well; I'll call Damon and go, 'What do you think of this? Am I going down the right road?'. Damon and I were both songwriters for bands we were in before (The Almighty and Brother Cane respectively), and that holds us in good stead. Then it's a call to Scott: 'What riffs have you got, what ideas have you got?' After that, it's a case of putting the jigsaw together."

> "I think the days of Black Star Riders playing six Lizzy songs in the set are behind us, but we can mix it up from night to night"

The Lizzy/BSR identity shift is still an issue live, with fans expecting to hear old favourites alongside recent material. The band deliberately backed off from recording new songs as Lizzy in 2012, the Kevin Shirley-produced *All Hell Breaks Loose* becoming the first release to bear the Black Star Riders name. But Johnson, who followed Vivian Campbell and Richard Fortus as Gorham's six-string oppo, reveals a new tactic to keep both themselves and their fans happy.

He wants to identify "half a dozen Thin Lizzy songs we could alternate from show to show. I think the days of Black Star Riders playing six Lizzy songs in the set are behind us, but we can certainly mix it up from night to night. The fans would dig that because we have such a great fanbase and they come to multiple shows, especially in the UK." For Ricky, "The majority of the set is going to be Black Star Riders. That's us – that's what it says on the tin!"

Tried and tested formula

Guitars-wise, the live show will bring familiar sights and sounds. "Les Pauls and Marshall amps have been such a part of not just the Black Star Riders sound but all the previous bands we've been in," Damon declares. "The Almighty, Thin Lizzy... it just works. We're open to trying other stuff, but when it comes to putting a show together for 90-plus minutes we wanna use the stuff you know sounds great.

"I don't envisage anybody taking out any sound-modifying apparatus, some new gizmo, the latest thing. But Ricky has a >

HEAVY ROTATION

Black Star Riders are deservedly staples of rock radio playlists, and also recently landed a Record of the Week (*Finest Hour*) on the less familiar territory of BBC Radio 2. Warwick appreciates the need to serve up melody to maximise across-the-board airplay. "That's something that we love – certainly Scott, having been in Thin Lizzy, their songs were phenomenal," he says. "The melody was phenomenal. So Damon and I realise it's all about the song, the catchiness; for me, there have to be hooks. The lyrics say something, but it has to be melodic as hell, that's very, very important."

For Johnson, the standout track on the new album is the rather more abrasive *Thinking About You Could Get Me Killed*. "It's a song I have played for my friends and family if they wanted to hear something from the new record. I feel the entire album from top to bottom, but this track has a great Ricky Warwick lyric, the band just sounds really mean. It's got a swagger to it that I'm proud of."

The song, inspired when Warwick – based stateside these days – found himself in conversation with a Vietnam veteran, is also Scott Gorham's pick. "When I first heard that line I thought, 'That is a killer!'. And it's not even gonna be a single." His guitar partner simply describes it as "Too rock for the world to handle!".

For Ricky himself, the anthemic *Testify Or Say Goodbye* is the one he thinks fans will come away from March's gigs singing. "It's a feelgood song, and I'm in a good mood." Don't touch that dial!

new guitar – a P-90 SG." Scott returned to Marshall in early 2016 after a spell endorsing Engl; he now plays through DSL100 heads and 1960BX cabs.

Having famously auditioned for Thin Lizzy in 1974 with an LP copy, Gorham was then led to Denmark Street by a cash-flush Phil Lynott to buy the 'real thing' – a '69 Deluxe with mini humbuckers that featured on 1978's *Live And Dangerous* but was later stolen. He's been loyal ever since, apart from a Strat flirtation in the 80s/90s. A chambered, Floyd Rose-equipped Les Paul Axcess took his fancy in 2011, with a custom 'tiger stripe' version arriving the following year.

Jailbreak, Lizzy's 1976 breakthrough album, was his third with the band – so are there any parallels with this latest release? "I think the difference with those albums and the three we've done as Black Star Riders is we've come a lot further in our three than we ever did with Thin Lizzy. The first album, *Nightlife*, to me was a failure on the production side. The second, *Fighting*, the production was so bad I can't even listen to that damn album! Then finally you get to *Jailbreak* when we got international breakout hits.

"With Black Star Riders, the production was good, the playing was good, the writing was good right off the bat, so we were already off to a really good platform. Whether we get a huge international hit out of this is another thing, but that's the parallel I see."

> "There was no fear, no chattering of teeth – is anybody gonna care? We know we have an audience. And that's a great feeling."

Johnson – who joined after a spell with Alice Cooper – relishes the absence of pressure to live up to the Lizzy legacy. In recording this album, he says: "There was no fear, no chattering of teeth – is anybody gonna care? We know we have an audience. And that's a great feeling. "Confidence was pretty high coming off two good records."

Scott agrees. "We've moved away from the whole Thin Lizzy thing. There are different chord changes, the way the harmony guitars are approached. Ricky's style is really coming out in a big way. I think this is a Black Star Riders album exclusively. We've been doing Lizzy around the world for five years. When you've done a certain thing for such a long time it's hard to wean yourself off that kind of drug. We've been together long enough we're finding different, more natural ways of doing things."

There's little doubt that, despite Lizzy touring the US earlier this year, the trio see the Black Star Riders project as their future. "When I was a kid," says Johnson, I thought the idea of playing music for a living was just a fantasy. This group of people, more than any band I've ever been a part of, is so committed to learning, improving in their songwriting, their playing and their performing. Ultimately, I'd say that's the key to longevity..."

Let's leave the last word to loquacious Irishman Warwick. Asked if he gets more of a thrill seeing a fan in a Black Star Riders T-shirt than a Lizzy one, he frowns briefly, then shrugs and smiles. "Just as long as they turn up they can wear whatever they like!"

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"We decided a long time ago that as a three-piece, we needed to sound as big as possible"

Formed in Southampton, Band Of Skulls have become a formidable hard-rocking trio, releasing fourth album *By Default* last year. We catch up with the band as they prepare to tour the US and Canada

Interview **Lars Mullen** Photos **Rod Maurice**

As a power trio, Band Of Skulls have been together for over 12 years, with Russell Marsden and drummer Matt Hayward first meeting at school almost 20 years ago, later drafting in Emma Richardson on bass. After making a major impression on the festival circuit last summer, completing an extensive tour of Canada and the USA and releasing fourth album *By Default*, it's fair to say that 2016 was a productive year for the band.

Speaking to *G&B* before setting off for the states, Marsden says: "We toured with the new songs in the UK and Europe and are now ready to promote this album in the USA and Canada. We have a big following stateside, so it's going to be a thrill to get back out there and play rock 'n' roll to the Americans, which is always a rewarding challenge. We have a lot of new material for them this time and are playing in bigger venues. We decided a long time ago that as a three-piece, we needed to sound as big as possible and use our vocals and harmonies to the full effect. I think this is an area that's massively under-used today. We grew up listening to bands when it was all about the vocals – The Beatles, Pink Floyd and even Motown. We've been singing together for so long now we can do it off the cuff. We might be rehearsing a new song and Emma may naturally take the lead and I'll just find a harmony, or vice versa, and when it clicks in you get this next level of emotion.

"There's no dead wood in this band, we all sing and are carefully filling in any gaps to make the sound as big as possible," says Richardson. "We also worked on how to counteract the inevitable hole that appears when Russell steps the guitar up to take a solo. I use Fender Bassman and Ampeg heads with 8x10 cabs, which have no trouble filling out the low end, but I'm also using an Electro-Harmonix POG2. This separate feed is routed back on stage through a Fender Blues DeVille combo. I only have it as a subtle effect, just enough to keep the rhythm section rocking.

"The whole power-trio sound has been a challenge for us from the start, and it pushes the band to be more creative musically and within our songwriting. There is an artistic licence that allows us to add a few extras in the studio, but not to a point where we couldn't reproduce anything live."

"For Band Of Skulls, it's a case of keeping it as simple as possible," says Marsden, "which allows us to express our own individual characters through the instruments and maintain the band's energy on stage – particularly Matt, he's a stylish yet such a hard-hitting drummer. You can almost feel the air pressure change when he kicks in – his playing is equal >

Band Of Skulls bassist Emma Richardson with her favoured Precision Bass

Marsden at the Belasco Theatre in Los Angeles

© Getty Images

throughout, so I don't have to fill in with guitar work."

Richardson, Marsden and Hayward [who it was announced had left the band after this interview with *G&B*] are all fine guitarists in their own right, which proves invaluable when it comes to songwriting, as Richardson explains: "It's cool that we all play guitar, so we'll sit around with a stripped-down acoustic session jiggling riffs and ideas. It's usually the best idea that wins, then we can start a structure within the delivery of the lyrics, irrespective of a male or female taking the lead vocal and who has the best harmony on each track. We try and mix it up as much as we can. It may seem a long way round, but this way we can all have an input rather than having one songwriter in the band. Band Of Skulls has three songwriters.

"We've learnt over the years that our best songs have been constructed from strong ideas," says Marsden. "I might come in with a demo I've been working on, but it'll be basic and not over-engineered, leaving plenty of headroom for the three of us to add our own input. That worked particularly well this time around with *By Default*.

"We are really pleased with this album, it portrays us again as a bluesy rock power trio, as did our first three albums, *Baby Darling Doll Face Honey*, *Sweet Sour* and *Himalayan*. This time, we've also drawn ideas from music that has influenced us over the years. It could be anything, even dance music, maybe music from the 40s and 50s, but what comes out at the end is still Band Of Skulls playing rock 'n' roll. It was recorded at Rockfield, and the first time we had worked with Gil Norton as producer, who has produced so many bands including Foo Figthers, Pixies, The Virginmarys and Patti Smith. We spent a lot of time on pre-production, rehearsing the songs, so we were fairly relaxed when we arrived, but we knew Gil was going to work us hard, and we are really pleased with the results."

> "We are really pleased with this album, it portrays us again as a bluesy rock power trio, as did our first three albums"

"I'm playing bass through necessity really," Richardson laughs, "I was already in a band as rhythm guitarist and vocalist when Russell and Matt asked me along to try out some songs with them playing bass. It seemed to gel straightaway. I'm really comfortable playing bass and singing.

"I've tried a lot of bass guitars, but I just keep coming back to a Fender Precision, which works for me in every department, from the weight, the balance and the way they hang on the shoulder. They just suit my style and have the perfect sound for the band, and they'll handle all the knocks I give them on tour.

"I have several now, two of which are main stage and studio basses, a sunburst with a rosewood fingerboard which was my first serious bass, and an Antigua finished model which, with a maple fingerboard, notably has more growl and a brighter attack. I rarely use a pick, just my fingers where I feel I'm more in control."

"We're a loud rock band," explains Marsden, "and I have a big overdriven sound. I've been asked many times how we get such a rock sound from gear not really related to bluesy rock 'n' roll. For me, it's a fun journey pushing quality equipment to the limit, which helps to discover new tones and sounds from equipment not designed for a specific sound or purpose.

"I hear some people say nobody wants a guitar solo anymore, but it's the top of the song for me and our audiences still love to hear my amps cranked and getting the treatment. I'm not into technical playing, I try to create my solos almost like a song with the song itself, and if the audience can sing it back with emotion I feel it's a well-constructed solo. It has to be vocal, a guitar solo could be a chorus or vice versa. I also feel there's a danger of having far too much gear. Both myself and Emma have experimented with big rigs and large pedalboards, but we seemed to keep reverting back to a version of what we had before and are masters of."

Guitar spotters will have noticed that Marsden is back to using his tried-and-tested Jazzmasters again on recent tours. He explains: "I leant towards Gretsch guitars for a while, using several models, including a White Falcon. They all sounded really good recorded and live, but my Jazzmasters kept calling me back. I have several, all now loaded with Monty's pickups. These include their custom Wide Range PAFs, low-output custom Jazzmaster units and P-90 vintage models tweaked for me. The good old Jazzmaster has always been my bread and butter, my gold USA '62 reissue is all over the new album.

"You can hear that unmistakable aggressive Jazzmaster attack on the intro to a song called *Bodies*. It's the sound that got me hooked on the Jazzmaster way back. We were halfway through recording a track on *By Default* that Emma sings, called *So Good*, when I just thought this song was crying out for a Tele. So I bought a black model with a Bigsby with a rosewood fingerboard, which will probably get used live as well. I am a bit of a tweaker, so I might customise it soon.

"My rig is always ongoing, although with just enough technology so it all works, but not too much that I feel detached. I've been using a pair of Fender Vibro-Kings, which I think are more of a British-sounding Fender.

"There's a lot of Fender top end and I'm running both with an extension cab, each loaded with a pair of 12s which take it to a different dimension by adding meaty, punchy mids and lows. It's a big 3D sound.

"I have one of the extension cabs fitted with the new SAM Systems internal mic units, which works really well. I'm currently using it live, mixing it alongside the conventional mic-on-a-stand method. These amps are extremely loud after 3, they deliver natural overdrive and compression, but if I need a little more I'll kick in a pedal."

> "Some people say nobody wants a guitar solo anymore, but it's the top of the song for me, and audiences love to hear my amps cranked"

In an era where it's increasingly difficult for guitar bands to find their way in a fragmented market, with physical CD sales dwindling, pressure from record labels and live venues disappearing from our cities' streets, the band are grateful for what they've acheived. "I'd say Band Of Skulls is a rare thing," says Marsden. "We were lucky to be able to write our own songs and go on to make a career from it, which I feel is happening less and less these days. You could argue that the cream rises to the top, or if you really want it you'll go out and get it, but it's difficult now. I would say, though, if you can play, people will want to come and see you live, the excitement of a live experience will never go away."

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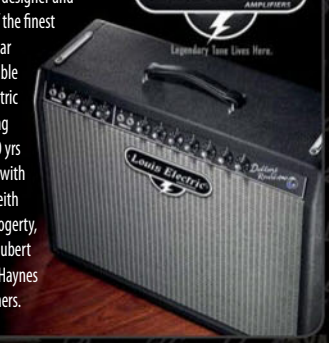

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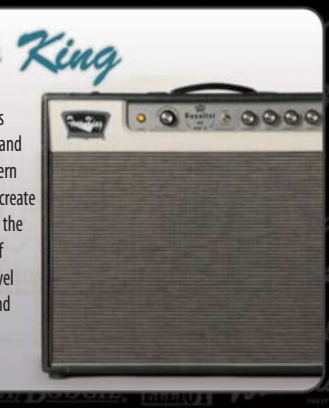

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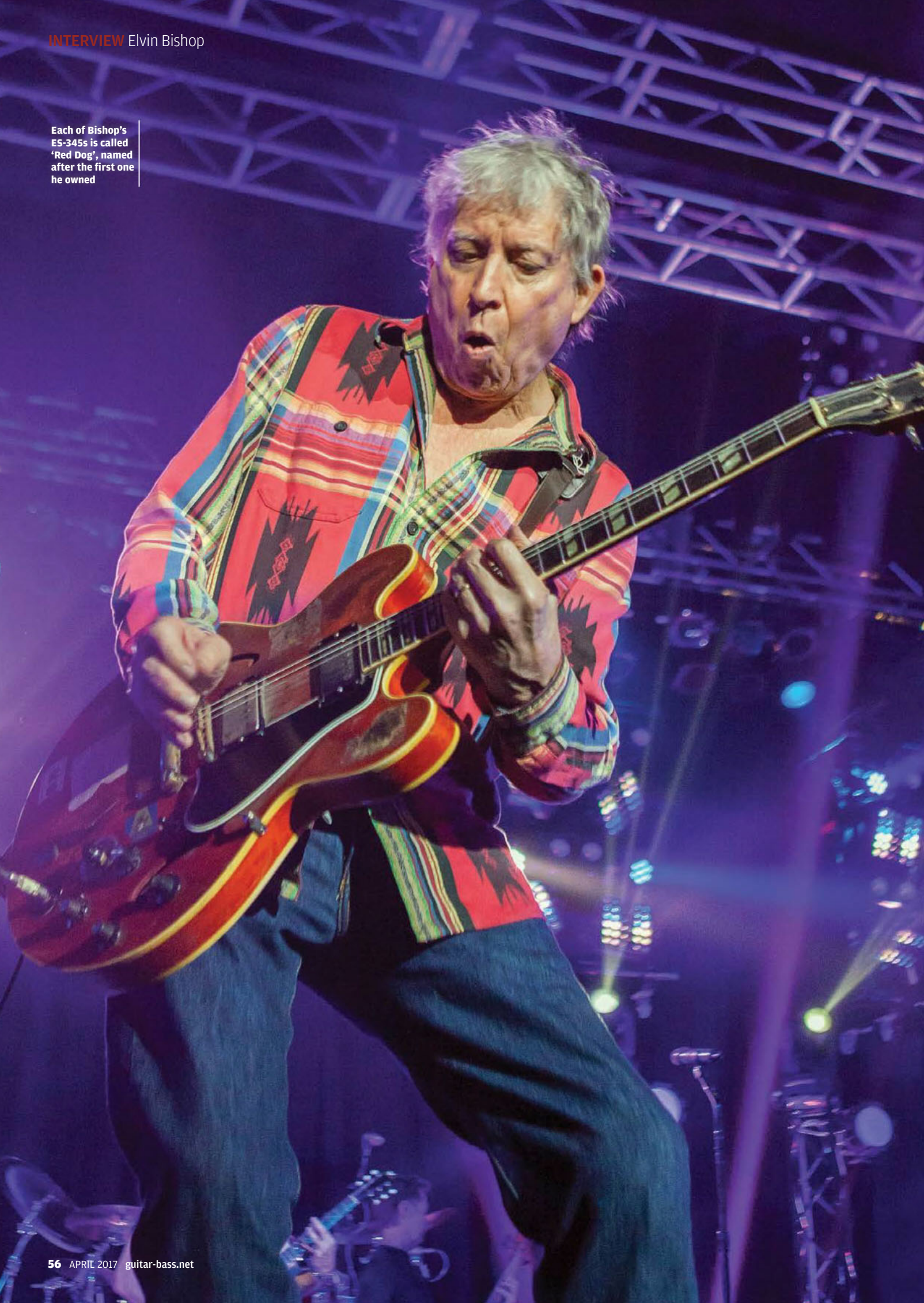


Each of Bishop's ES-345s is called 'Red Dog', named after the first one he owned

BISHOP OF BLUES

He's spent more than 50 years in the music business and was an important cornerstone of the blues scene that emerged from 1960s Chicago. *G&B* meets Elvin Bishop to talk guitar

Story **Bob Hewitt** | Photography **Bob Hakins**

Elvin Bishop is most famously associated with The Paul Butterfield Blues Band – and his fellow guitar ace Michael Bloomfield. The band's rise to prominence, as one of the first truly racially integrated blues acts, came at a crucial point in the 1960s. White audiences were just starting to listen in significant numbers to blues music and delve into the timeline of the black musicians who had previously been neglected by mainstream record companies and radio stations.

There is little doubt that bands such as Butterfield's and The Rolling Stones played a major part in that long-overdue cultural awakening. Musicians who had struggled to be heard beyond specialist blues radio stations were suddenly thrust into the spotlight on the world stage. Names such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter and Otis Rush went from playing ghetto blues clubs to big festival stages.

Bishop moved from Oklahoma to Chicago's south side in 1959 thanks to a college scholarship. It was an ideal grounding for him to build up his six-string skills, not only with his new friend Butterfield but also alongside legendary bluesmen John Lee Hooker and Billy Boy Arnold.

1963 saw Bishop and Butterfield hook up with Howlin' Wolf's former rhythm section – Sam Lay on drums and Jerome Arnold on bass. A little later, Mark Naftalin joined the band on keyboards, followed by the legendary Bloomfield on guitar.

This gave birth to The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, who would go on to thrill blues fans across the USA and beyond. People still talk about the freeform guitar playing of Bishop and Bloomfield on the classic *East-West* album's title track, and their intertwining guitars influenced the likes of The Allman Brothers, who in later years Bishop would work with. It was during this period that Bishop fell in love with a certain Gibson ES-345 after trading in his Fender Telecaster. He called that first guitar 'Red Dog' – and the name continued onto all the 345s that followed.

Bishop quit the Butterfield band after five years and three albums to pursue his own vision, and he has released a catalogue of recordings under his own name over the past 40 years.

Since releasing his 2014 Grammy-nominated album, *Can't Even Do Wrong Right*, Bishop has been inducted into The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and The Blues Hall of Fame. He has also won The Living Blues Award for Best Album in 2014, and a host of other prestigious accolades.

With his band, Bob Welsh and Willy Jordan, Bishop releases his latest album *The Big Fun Trio* this month with guests Charlie Musselwhite, Kim Wilson and Rick Estrin sharing harmonica duties. Featuring some classic straightahead rocking blues, Bishop scatters hilarious lyrics throughout the tracks of both recent albums – hence the title of his latest release. He says: "Every time I pick up my guitar something new comes out of it!" Not bad after a 50-year career that has seen him play alongside Jimi Hendrix, BB King, Eric Clapton and a host of other guitar luminaries.

In 1988, Bishop first signed up with the legendary Bruce Iglauer – founder of Chicago's Alligator Records. Iglauer told *G&B:* "Elvin Bishop brings warmth, sense of humour and reverence for blues tradition to all the music he creates.

"He is an iconic figure in the blues, and we are proud to have Elvin on our label as an artist and a friend."

When *G&B* catches up with Elvin at his California home, we start out by asking about his enthusiasm for gigging – and his passion for gardening...

Q You're obviously still enjoying getting out there and playing...

"Well, take a look at BB King and John Lee Hooker – they played right up until they died! My wife wants me to quit, but I told her it isn't football, you don't have to retire at 30. My body is going to wear out before my mind does.

"There's more happening for me now than ever, I think. I'm playing lots of festivals and they put me in The Blues Hall of Fame, too. I put in my time playing over 300 gigs a year. I was a maniac for a long time, like BB King you know? But now I have a lovely wife and a beautiful place out here in the country with a nice garden. I have lots of flowers and fruit trees, I grow everything from seed and I bottle up over 400 jars of fruit a year, so they need a big-ass crowbar to get me out of here! But I go places, and right now I have a new CD on Alligator Records with my trio and I've done some gigs with [blues harp ace] Charlie Musselwhite at folk and jazz festivals – just for fun.

"I'm in a good position, because I'm enjoying doing gigs and festivals with my band, and I've been writing and publishing my own work for over 50 years. There's not much financial pressure going on. If a gig pays well and sounds like fun, I'll do it; if it doesn't, I'll pass on it."

Q As well as your newer material, do the crowds still expect to hear the classics from the Butterfield era?

"It's hard to figure. Because I've had such a long career, there are a lot of people who come to see me now, 'cos I guess we're getting to the age when they get sentimental or something. Sure, they saw me with The Butterfield Blues Band in the 1960s, but there are also the folks who got onboard when there was a viable commercial category for me in the 1970s with Southern rock. For the last 20 years or so, I've played the blues circuit – actually, I've always played as much blues as the traffic would bear. I know what I'm up there for, and if I don't play for the people I won't be asked back, because I entertain people for a living, you know?

"I'm pretty well known in blues circles – and if I 'eyeball' the crowd, I get a feel for what they want. I think I've improved with age, and if you do something for 50-plus years and don't improve, then shame on you! The thing I like about blues is this – it's for people who want more out of their music. To a lot of people, music is in the same category as hairstyles or clothing trends, but blues is for people who want to connect up with real life."

Q Who do you enjoy listening to from the younger blues players – the torch bearers for the future?

"I'll tell you who is a great guitar player, and that's Derek Trucks. That guy can play blues or gospel... anything. Also, Kid Andersen, from Norway, is one hell of a guitarist."

Q Let's talk a little about your early days...

"I was born in California, but we moved to Iowa, where I grew up on a farm, pretty primitive as there was no electricity or running water. When I was about 11 we moved to Oklahoma, with indoor plumbing and everything!

"I was attracted to the electric guitar, and what got me going was attending dances and seeing all the girls going crazy for the guitar player. When you're adolescent, hormones rule!

"No one in my family was musical, and I didn't know anyone who played – also, we had very little surplus money. I went to the local pawnshop, looked for the cheapest guitar they had – usually a Kay or Harmony, or something with strings two inches off the fingerboard. Not knowing any different, I bought one of these things, got it home and found the guitar damn hard to play. I'd try to get people to show me stuff, but my fingers would hurt and I'd give up, until I went to the next dance then realised I'd better get back on it!

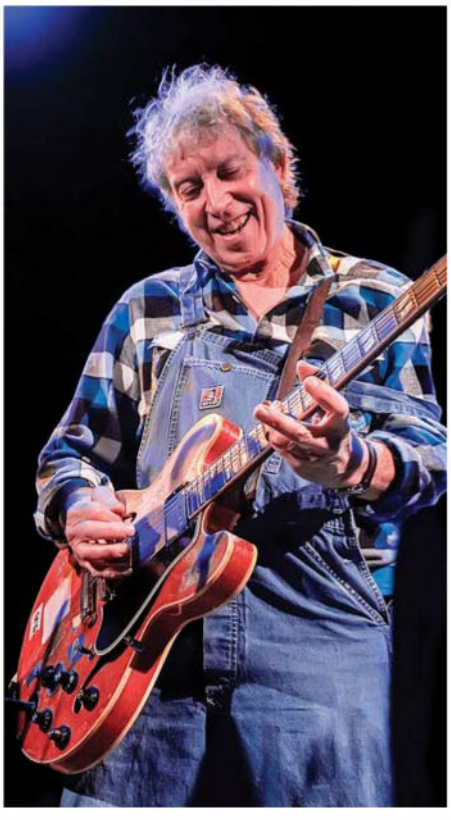
"I learned a few chords, and got interested in blues after hearing it on local radio. But Oklahoma was segregated – black people had the blues music, and I was not allowed to hang out with them whatsoever. I did make some moves in that direction, by sneaking out of the window and going to the clubs in the black part of town. Sometimes they would let you in – but most times not, as they could get into a lot of trouble. I'd heard that Chicago was a lot cooler on the social side and I knew that's where the blues was.

"I got a scholarship, which meant I could go to any college I wanted, so I enrolled at the University of Chicago. There were literally hundreds of blues clubs in Chicago at that time, so the first thing I did was to make friends with a black guy who worked at the cafeteria in the college. Within a week, I was out with him in the ghetto, going to the best blues clubs.

"I got into the music real quick – I was practising practically 24 hours a day, and figured out what type of guitar to buy. I'd go over to friends' houses, and they would invite me in – I made friends with a lot of musicians. Just being able to see their hands on the fingerboard helped me to improve really fast. I'd been listening to blues music for a long time, but being able to find out what the words of a song meant – and the lifestyle that went along with it – was something else."

Q How did you manage time for study and music?

"I was lucky back then, because at Chicago University you didn't have to go to class all the time as long as you could pass the test at the end of term. I would spend the week before a test studying non-stop – then pass. I didn't really want to blow the educational thing, because it meant so much to my family. They'd been through the depression, and most of my family were farmers so no one had the opportunity to go to college. It would have been an unpopular decision to drop out of college to pursue music, although I eventually did. The family could see I was making some money, so they forgave me!"



> "Everything that has happened has been a total surprise to me – we were in the right place at the right time"

Q What guitar did you settle on at that point?

"I think I was playing a Gibson Les Paul Junior to start off with, but when I got together with [Paul] Butterfield, we were given Fender guitars and amplifiers. I kept the amp, but sold the guitar right away – a Telecaster doesn't suit me, it just feels like a piece of wood with some strings, and the neck is too slick.

"Then I got lucky. I met Louis Myers [guitarist with Little Walter's band, The Aces]. He came along to a gig one night, and I was having terrible trouble with the bridge on my guitar, I was breaking a lot of strings. Louis had a Gibson ES-345 and he let me try it. I told him it felt good – not slick and lacquered like my Fender. He turned to me and said, 'You're just square as a pool table and twice as green – there's nothing wrong with that Fender guitar'. I laughed at him and he said, 'You're just hitting the strings too hard – if I had that guitar I'd never break a string'.

"We'd been drinking quite a bit, so I said to Louis, 'Oh yeah, so why don't we just trade then?'. He turned to me and replied, 'All right, I'll show ya... and I won't break any strings on it!'. Well, he came back the following week and wanted to trade back, saying, 'Every time I touch this Fender a string pops'. If I'd had an ounce of decency in me I'd have traded back – but I'd fallen in love with the 345 so that was that."

Q Is that the original Red Dog, and do you still have it?

"Yes, it was – and no I don't! Thanks to the way the airlines were back then, and the fact that I used to drink a lot in those days, you became exposed to thieves. I'd lose a guitar every four or five years, but at that time they didn't cost much so I'd go to the pawnshop and pick up another just like it. The one I have now is way over borrowed time... I've had it 15 or 20 years and recently looked online to check how much it was worth, so I'm more careful now!"

Q So what do you take on the road now?

"I tried to get the Gibson Custom Shop to make [a 345] for me, and they said, 'Yep, we can do that'. They built a guitar for me, and it was just perfect... for Chet Atkins or someone like that, you know? It just wasn't a blues guitar at all, although it was really nice and perfectly balanced all the way across – it just didn't feel like my other one. Eventually, I shipped my old 345 to them and they copied it pretty good. That's the one I take on the road these days – and my original stays at home!"

Q How would you sum up the past 50-plus years?

"Well, Mike Bloomfield was like 'music on two legs', you know? So playing alongside him was great. Everything that has happened has been a total surprise to me – we were in the right place at the right time. We had this big, beautiful body of music called 'the blues' – and the majority of the white population of the USA hadn't met it yet. The only way white people heard blues music in those distant days was maybe at a folk festival. There may have been a 'token black artiste' because blues was considered a small department of folk music. The blues is all about expressing yourself, it's not something you're obliged to play... just play what you feel."

Special thanks go to Bill Giardini of Alligator Records for his assistance with this article.

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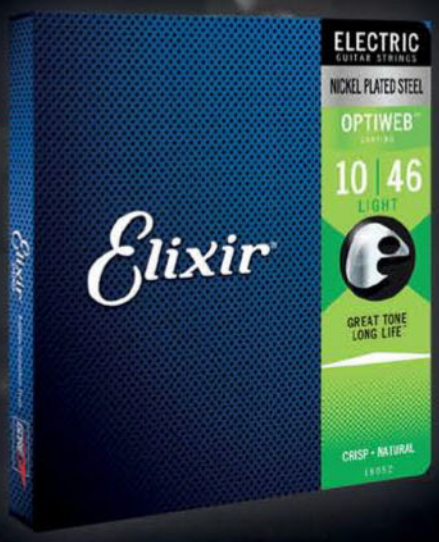

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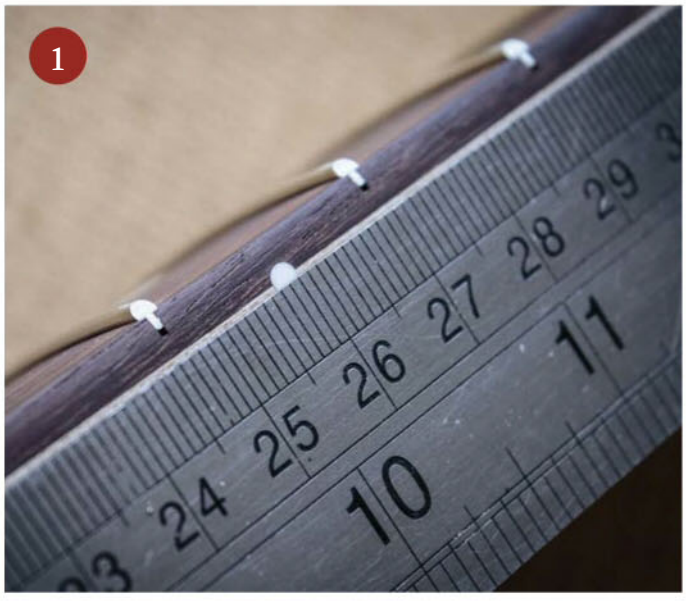
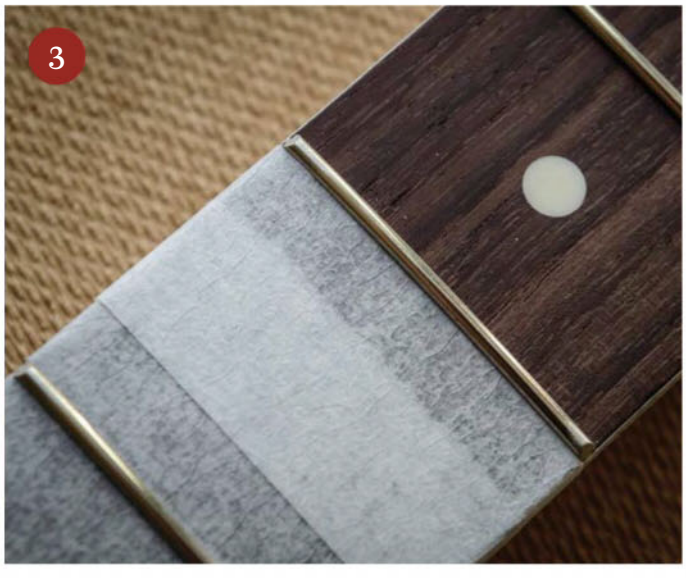
DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO LEVEL FRETS

Have you ever sent your guitar off for a fret-levelling job and wondered how it's done and whether you might be able to do the job yourself? **HUW PRICE** reveals the secrets behind level, smooth and shiny frets





1 The ruler test showed there was a back bow, so we released the truss-rod tension to get the tops of the frets as level as possible

2 The first line of masking tape is positioned along the very edge of the fingerboard

3 Two strips of masking tape are needed to bridge the lower frets, and they should butt right up against the frets

4 Once the entire board is masked off, the neck should look something like this

Although many guitarists eventually come round to the idea of doing their own setups – and maybe even electronic maintenance or modifications – fretwork is usually left to 'professionals'. Maybe a good analogy would be checking our own tyre pressures and doing our own oil changes, but leaving engine tuning and brake adjustments to a qualified mechanic.

Just like your car's brake pads, your frets will inevitably wear down through use. On the plus side, worn frets are not life threatening, but they can compromise the playability of your guitar. Unlike brake pads, fret wear tends to be localised and will be most apparent in the areas of the fretboard where you play the most. Fret wear can take various forms. Look closely and you may notice areas where the tops of the frets are no longer rounded, and instead have a flat and wide appearance. You may also see string indentations in the frets that can make string bending a bumpy ride. Low frets and dents can also cause string buzzing that can be remedied only by raising the action and/or adjusting the truss rod for extra relief – both of which are workarounds rather than fixes. If your ear is good enough, you may also notice that the intonation can sound a bit off.

I did my first fret level and dress because my guitar played really badly and I didn't have the funds to pay a luthier to do it. I managed to do the job and improve the playability of my guitar as a result. A procedure I once considered daunting or even frightening now feels routine, and I believe anybody with a modest selection of tools and a methodical approach can pull off a fret job.

In this month's workshop, I'll be taking you through the stages involved in fret levelling, dressing and polishing. I'll also be discussing the tools and materials you'll need and some of the pitfalls that you may encounter.

Flat out

The first step towards a successful outcome with this procedure is to ensure the neck is as straight as possible. You can buy specialist straight-edge tools with notches cut out for the frets, that will rest on top of the fingerboard. Sighting along the bottom of the straight edge, you should adjust the truss rod until no daylight is visible between

5 **Draw across the tops of the frets with a black marker pen**

the fingerboard and the straight edge. This method depends on the fingerboard being flat, which in the case of heavily played vintage guitars, or cheaply made modern ones, won't necessarily be the case. Another method is to place a straight-edge ruler along the underside of the fretboard.
I tried this with our Fender-licensed Jazzmaster-style neck from Allparts UK and it appeared as if the neck had arrived with a slight back bow because a line of maple could be seen below the rosewood board halfway along the neck 1.

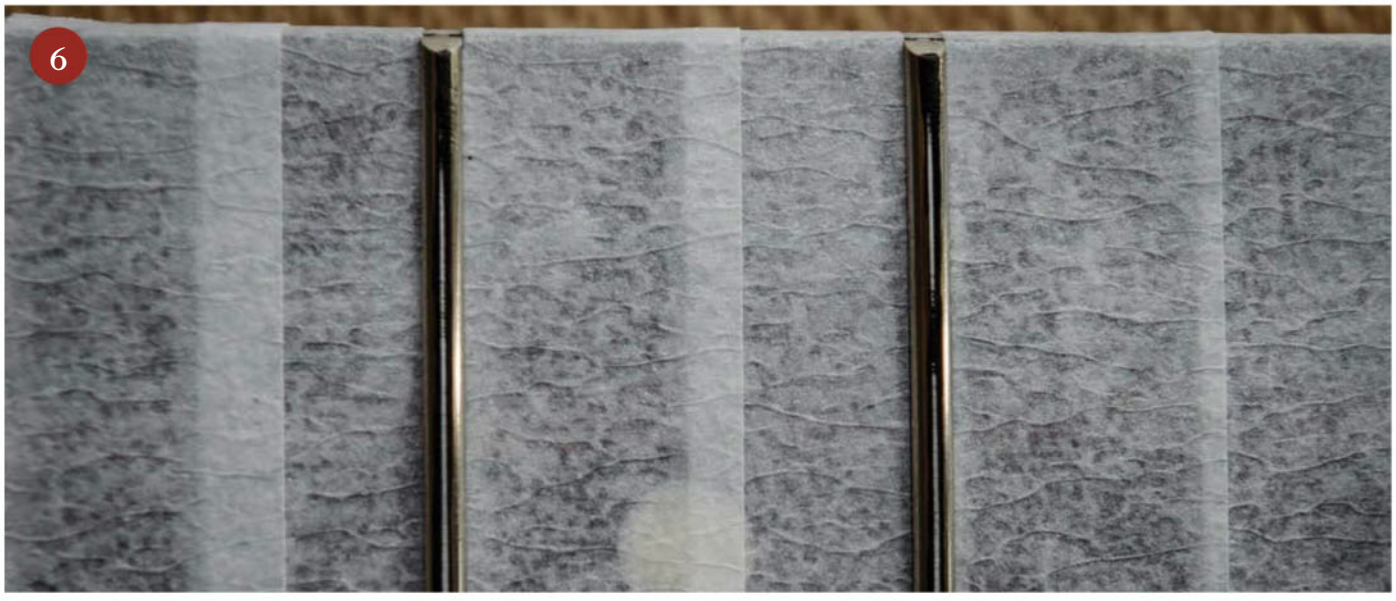
I released the truss-rod tension very slightly to make the fingerboard's underside line dead straight, and when I ran the rule over the frets everything seemed about as level as it could be. Since the neck was brand new, I assume the factory must put a little bit of tension on the rod to compensate for the string pull when it's first installed on a guitar.

Unfortunately, you can't always rely on the fingerboard edge line or the fretboard being perfectly level. Sometimes you just have to make a judgement on the best starting point before you start levelling, bearing in mind the object is always to remove as little material as possible from the frets.

On the edge

Once satisfied with the neck straightness, it's time to check out the fret ends. With new guitars, it's not uncommon to feel the frets protruding from the fingerboard edges, and pokey frets are not conducive to a smooth and comfortable playing feel. Sometimes wood ends up being turned into guitars before it has seasoned fully, and even well-seasoned wood can swell and shrink with changes in heat and humidity. We're talking about maybe only a fraction of a millimetre of movement, but that's more than enough to make fret ends protrude.

You can knock back the fret ends using a luthier's bevelling file with 90-degree setting. Alternatively, you can use double-sided tape to stick fine abrasive paper to a flat block. You could use a carbide/oil stone sharpening block, an offcut of kitchen work surface or the base of a wood plane. Whichever you choose, just ensure the surface is dead flat and, in the case of the plane, fully retract the blade. Two or three light passes with the file or 800 or 1,000-grit paper taped to a block >



6 After a few strokes of the block the leveled areas show up as shiny metal, but where black remains more work is needed

7 Once you have shiny and unbroken lines flanked by black lines across every fret you can be sure the fret tops are level

8 This little file does most of the work, and the detachable handle makes the file easier to grip and control

should be sufficient. If the neck is sprayed, take care not to remove the existing finish. You should try tilting the block slightly to restrict contact to the very edge of the fingerboard without inadvertently changing the angle of the bevel.

Check your progress by rubbing the palm of your hand along the board edges, and when you can no longer feel protruding frets, you're done.

Mask on

Filing frets generates metal dust that can become embedded in wood, and whenever files and blades are used, there's a danger of accidental scratches or scrapes. To minimise the risks, you should use low-tack masking tape to protect the fingerboard. The sticky stuff tends to rip out wood fibres, but if all you can get is the regular stuff, tear off strips and stick it to your clothes before sticking it on your guitar to reduce its tackiness.

I always begin by running tape along the full length of both fingerboard edges, followed by shorter strips placed across the fingerboard and tight up against the frets 2 & 3. At first, you'll need to double up to cover the spaces between the frets, but beyond the sixth or seventh fret – depending on the scale – the spaces between the frets become narrower than the tape.

Draw out a length of tape, place a ruler along the centre line and divide it in two with a sharp blade. For the highest frets, you'll have to divide the tape into three sections. The key is to cover up every bit of the fingerboard, but some consider the masking-off stage unnecessary with lacquered maple fingerboards. If you lack experience with this sort of work, it's best to play it safe 4.

Levelling off

Using a black permanent marker pen, I draw a line across the top of each fret – which is yet another reason to protect the board with tape 5. It's then time once again to reach for that flat block or plane with the abrasive paper taped to it and crack on with the main event, which is levelling the frets.

Predictably enough, fine-grade paper cuts into the frets slower than coarser abrasives will. This means that the fret levelling process takes longer, and you may need to change to fresh abrasive paper halfway through. The plus side is that the scratches left on the top of the frets by less abrasive paper will be finer,

and they'll be easier to polish out at a later point.

Since these were brand new frets, I went with 1,000-grit paper because I figured that very little effort would be required to get everything level. This turned out to be the case, and the levelling procedure took no more than a couple of minutes to complete.

You can tell when you're done by looking at the tops of the frets. You should see a thin line of freshly exposed metal all along the top of the fret, with a line of black on each side 6. Areas where the black line remains unscathed indicate low spots, and you should continue with your levelling block until all the black ink has been removed from the tops of the frets 7.

Avoid pressing on the neck when you're levelling the frets. If you're working on a bolt-on neck – which hopefully you've had the good sense to separate from the body – place it on a flat surface and press down on the middle area of the neck with your finger. You will see that it bends, so if you press hard with your levelling block you'll negate all the effort you put into straightening the neck. The weight of the block alone should be sufficient.

Rather than rubbing the block back and forth, I tend to use long strokes, starting at one end of the neck and finishing at the other. If the nut is still on the guitar, it's always advisable to wrap it with folded kitchen paper (or some such) held in place with masking tape. Also, make sure you direct the block strokes away from the nut because bone breaks easily – as I've discovered the hard way.

Crowning glory

Freshly levelled frets are flat on top, but they should actually be rounded. Ideally, the string will make minimal contact with the fret wire – and the best way to ensure this happens is to file the top edges of the levelled frets to reinstate the curve. This process is called crowning.

You can buy specialist fret-crowning files with concave surfaces that are designed to impart the perfect curve. Unfortunately, they are quite pricey and the one I bought many years ago has seldom been used. I have always preferred using a small rectangular file from a set of needle files that I found in Maplin years ago, and they still stock a decent selection.

It's just a cheap Chinese-made file, but it's relatively fine and it gets the results I need quickly and >

9 The top of the centre fret has been crowned, leaving a very thin scuff line that will eventually go from end to end

10 Allparts necks come with nicely done bevels, but the edges feel a tad sharp

11 After rolling the file over the ends, the bevels should look something like this

12 A small felt buffing wheel on the end of a flexible Dremel shaft makes light work of fret polishing

13 Polishing work has begun on the top frets, and already the masking tape is beginning to look mucky

14 The masking tape is removed to reveal clean wood, shiny frets and soft edges

accurately. In fact, I recently treated myself to a detachable handle to make it easier to grip 8. I file along the length of the fret using a rolling motion towards the centre and I always ensure that the dull, non-cutting, edge of the file is oriented towards the board.

As you work, you should see the black pen marks either side of the exposed metal line gradually disappear 9. I continue filing until all that's left of the levelling marks along the top of the fret is a thin line – about the width of a human hair.

Rounding up

The bevel at the fret ends can sometimes feel sharp, and this compromises player comfort 10. You can expect rounded fret ends on high-end guitars, but cheaper guitars and new parts necks such as ours can feel a bit rough. By rolling fret ends, we can dramatically improve the feel of a guitar because your hand won't feel like it's sliding over a series of road bumps.

You can use a file similar to the one I used for crowning, or a smaller triangular file to round over the bevel. The trick is to ensure that the blunt edge of the file is oriented towards the fretboard and to pass the file over the bevel edges using a rolling motion. Try to put as little downward pressure on the file as possible – in fact, the weight of the file itself should be sufficient.

I perform three strokes on each side of the bevel, working my way from the board to the top of the fret. You shouldn't be aiming to remove a lot of material, but merely soften the corners. At first, the fret ends may look worse, but the next stage will sort them out 11.

Shine on

Filing leaves scratches on the fretwire that look unsightly and can make string bending tougher and noisier. Ideally, you want a smooth mirror shine on your frets, and it's not that tough to achieve. Start by buffing the fret tops and ends with 800-grit wet and dry paper – used dry – then follow up with 1,000 or 1,200-grit. After the abrasive paper, I use ultra-fine wire wool and finish up with micromesh cloth – 3,000 or 4,000-grit is about right.

If you are going to buy only one specialist tool for carrying out fretwork, I would suggest getting a flexible shaft extension for a Dremel tool. You can find them online for under £10. Fit a small felt buffing wheel attachment to the end, dab a small quantity of chrome polish paste onto the wheel and you'll be able to bring the frets up to a mirror-like gleam within a few minutes 12.

For each dab of polish, I work on about five frets, and you shouldn't neglect the ends. I also use the Dremel on a slow-to-medium speed setting. Once you have worked your way all along the board, you can buff off any excess polish and remove the masking tape 13 & 14.

Congratulations – you're done!

NEXT MONTH...

Huw finally finishes his Gretsch restoration project by re-setting the neck, refinishing the body and adding some special ingredients...

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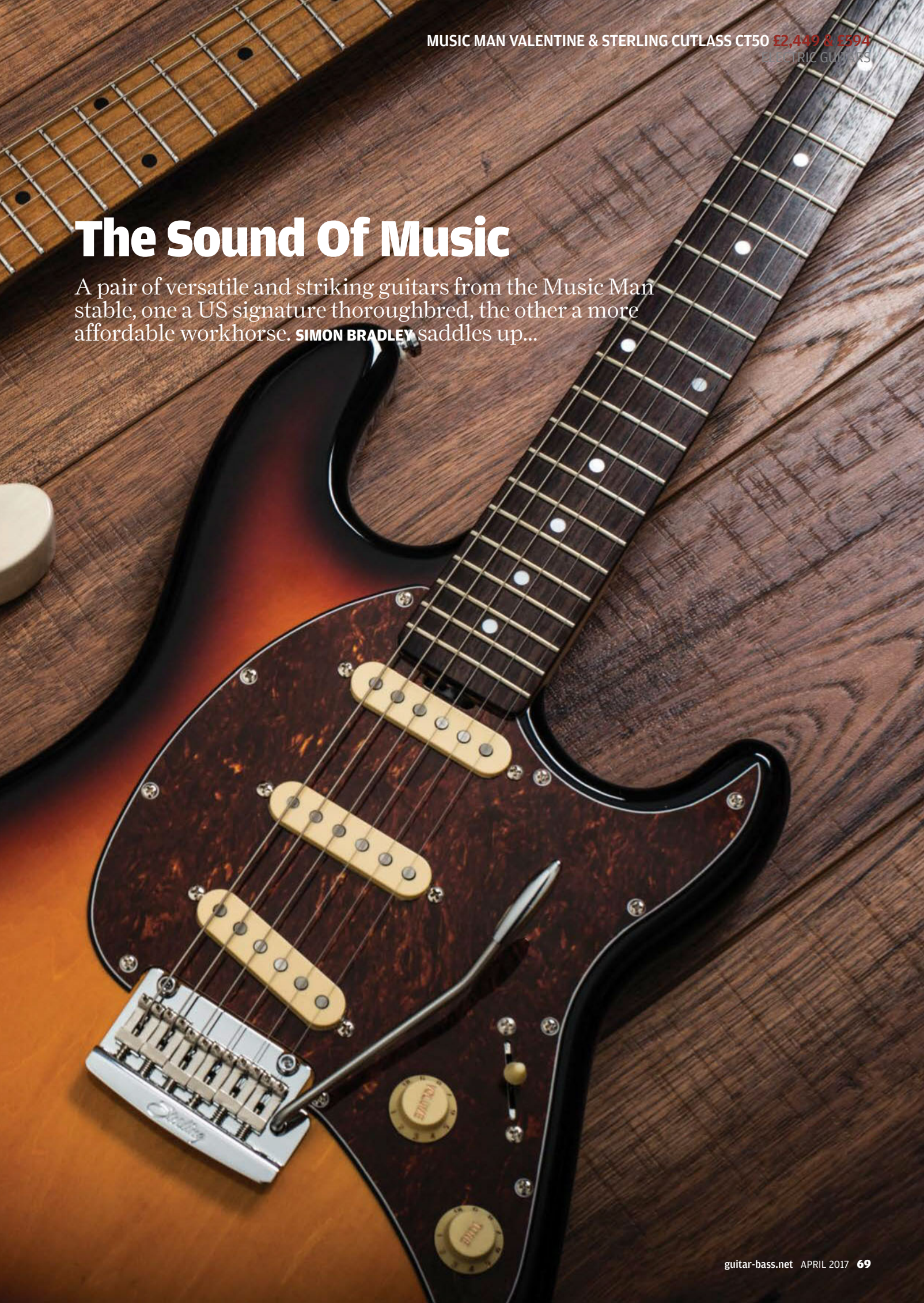
The Sound Of Music

A pair of versatile and striking guitars from the Music Man stable, one a US signature thoroughbred, the other a more affordable workhorse. **SIMON BRADLEY** saddles up...



Music Man's current range encompasses not only some of the most sumptuous signature models available anywhere, but also a number of modern recreations of some truly classic designs. The quality and playability have never been in question, and now the company has applied its know-how to a range of stripped-down versions of selected established MM guitars and basses under the Sterling by Music Man brand.

Music Man Valentine

This is the signature model of the criminally underrated James Valentine from Maroon 5. On the face of it, it seems a straightforward instrument, far removed from the bells and whistles of The Game Changer and Steve Morse models, but there's plenty going on under the hood. An obvious talking point concerns the pickups. Both are in-house Alnico 5 units and include an unusual single coil in the bridge. It's the size of a standard humbucker and, as MM's Derek Brooks explains, Valentine was involved heavily in their development.

"James told us what sounds he was looking for and we made several prototypes," Brooks tells *G&B*. "He wanted one guitar to capture the neck pickup of his Gibson semis and a Tele-ish bridge pickup, although we did experiment with some P-90 style pickups too. The bridge single coil has elements associated with Tele pickups," he continues. "But it has a different wind and the steel bottom plate is smaller. The DC resistance of the pickup is nearly 11k, so it certainly has its own voice."

We're assured that the humbucker-style baseplate and cover have no significant effect on the tone, and the single row of polepieces are not only slanted but staggered too.

The Valentine's hardtail bridge has a removable cover for player comfort

"The stagger approximates the range of a vintage Strat or Tele, but the proximity of each string to the magnet is more uniform, which provides the desired balance in sound," says Brooks.

In addition, the electronics include an active preamp for a boost in gain of up to 20dB set beneath a push/push volume pot, and a coil split that solos the humbucker's neck-side coil, situated under the push/push tone pot.

Valentine's love of Teles and small-bodied semis such as the Gibson ES-346 is echoed in the design of the ash body

The Valentine joins John Petrucci's JP15 in bringing a roasted maple neck to the table. It has a lovely honeyed appearance and, in addition to the flawless oil and wax finish, sports 22 stainless steel frets, a compensated nut and that unmistakable 4+2 mini headstock.

Valentine's love of Telecasters and small-bodied semis such as the Gibson ES-346 and Collings I-35 is echoed in the design of the ash body, with the dimensions of both cutaways nodding towards both of these influences. Interestingly, the body tapers slightly, too, going from 38.5mm thickness at the lower waist to 33mm at the upper, a concept, suggested by MM's head honcho Sterling Ball, that imparts a more intimate connection to the guitar.

Sterling Cutlass CT50

There's a significant jump in quality between the Sterling guitars and those produced under the OLP banner a few years back. While the latter were cheap 'n' cheerful copies of selected MM instruments, the Sterling range is of a far higher construction value with specs that offer a number of features that make their American alternatives so attractive.

The Cutlass can trace its roots back to the 70s and Leo Fender's tenure at Music Man. Apocryphally at least, Leo worked on both the embryonic Cutlass and StingRay designs and, loaded with three vintage-voiced single coils and sporting an impressive three-tone sunburst finish, we can certainly feel his influence here.

The biggest surprise lies with the neck: it's far bigger than we were expecting, both wider and deeper at the first fret than the Valentine. It possesses a significant soft-V profile, too, the apex of which flattens off around the 11th fret. It therefore provides an alternate playing experience to that we'd hitherto encountered from other Music Man guitars, which we applaud.

In use

The Tele bridge pickups from the mid-50s that we've encountered have a DC resistance of around 7k, and the additional heat of >

The roasted maple neck feels as good as it looks

The Valentine's neck humbucker is ideal for many styles, giving the guitar a varied tonal palette

The Maroon 5 guitarist was involved throughout the design process of his first signature guitar

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Music Man Valentine

EVH's **Wolfgang** range has really come into its own, with the USA hardtail version **from £2,475**, a symphony of basswood and ebony, arguably one of the best American solidbodies of recent times. The **PRS S2 Vela £1,289** mixes an all-mahogany vibe with a pair of unusual pickups that include the spanky Type-D single coil in the neck. **Godin**'s **Session Custom '59 from £849** features a Duncan '59 neck humbucker alongside a hot n' spicy Custom Cajun single coil in the bridge, and if you've yet to sample the wonderful rock maple neck, wait no longer.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Sterling Cutlass

Fender's **Classic Series '50s Stratocaster Lacquer £939** offers a maple neck and soft-V profile alongside a trio of vintage-voiced pickups and a nitrocellulose finish to the body. Elsewhere, the **ESP LTD SN-200 £353** is excellent value and contrasts nicely with the more rocktastic incumbents of ESP's catalogue. Loaded with three ESP single coils and a Wilkinson vibrato, it plays really well and would be a great first 'proper' guitar. **Schecter**'s **Traditional Standard** from **£525** offers more restrained pickups and either Tobacco Sunburst or Arctic White finishes for a suitably vintage vibe.

The unobtrusive five-bolt neck join of both guitars allows for effortless upper-fret access

The Sterling's unmistakable headstock is loaded with a sextet of locking machineheads

The design and look of Sterling's vintage-style vibrato betrays the influence of a certain Leo Fender

the Valentine bridge pickup is immediately apparent. With an amp set to the point of break-up, open chords ring out with the ideal balance of trebly twang and meaty midrange. Kicking in the preamp adds not only volume but, as expected, body too, and could double as both a solo boost and an additional tone in its own right. What's more, the Silent Circuit keeps everything as quiet as a mime's grave.

The soupy neck pickup provides an inspirational tonal contrast and, while full and warm, doesn't necessarily recall great Gibson semi tones of yore. This is not an issue, though, as the tones here are truly wonderful, allowing for soulful blues licks, rock solos and jazzier passages. There's a just-audible pop when the coil split is engaged, which is disappointing, but the resultant tone, throwing a soupçon of glassy high end and reduced bass into the mix is, again, a joy.

Tonally, the Cutlass performs as we'd expected, with a good range of Strat-style tones that tick the majority of boxes. To our ears, the bridge and middle settings lack a little body, and we would have liked more character from the neck too. That said, the guitar plays beautifully and is a genuine alternative to the wide range of Fenders out there.

The Cutlass performs as we'd expected, with a good range of Strat-style tones that tick the majority of boxes

We have to confess that we found the Cutlass tricky to keep in tune – especially, as is so often the case, the pesky G string. Of course, a string change cures most ills in this area and, thanks to the compensated nut and 11-48 strings out of the box, there were no such issues with the Valentine.

These are two very different guitars from wildly varying price points but both offer good value. The Valentine's price tag is justified by its near-perfect neck and majestic tones, while the Cutlass offers an interesting alternative for Strat fans. We'd happily use either in anger, but there's no getting away from the Valentine's wonderful tones and the feel of its neck. We love it.

KEY FEATURES

Music Man Valentine

- **PRICE** From £2,449 (with flightcase)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid ash body with four-ply tortoiseshell teardrop scratchplate; hardtail bridge with vintage-style bent saddles; roasted flamed maple bolt-on neck with gunstock oil and wax blend finish; roasted maple fingerboard with 10-inch radius; 22 medium stainless steel frets; compensated nut; locking Schaller M6-IND tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Music Man custom-wound single coil with staggered polepieces (bridge) and MM humbucker (neck)
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone, three-way blade selector, push/push active preamp and push/pull coil split
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Trans Buttermilk (as reviewed), Trans Maroon, Trans Black, Satin Natural
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.3mm at nut, 56.9mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.63kg/8lbs
- **CONTACT** Strings & Things 01273 440 442 **www.music-man.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Phenomenal neck
+ Tonally very versatile
+ High construction values

- The coil tap's audible pop
- Pro-level specs come at a price

A restrained signature model that marries a wealth of great tones with a fantastic neck. Best start saving

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Sterling Cutlass CT50

- **PRICE** £594
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar, made in China
- **BUILD** Basswood body with three-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate; bolt-on maple neck with natural finish; rosewood fingerboard with 12-inch radius; 22 medium frets; vintage-style vibrato; locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Three Sterling single coils
- **CONTROLS** Volume and tone, five-way blade selector
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Three-Tone Sunburst (as reviewed) and Fiesta Red (with rosewood neck only), Black, Seafoam Green and Olympic White (with maple neck only)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5-inch
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.5mm at first fret, 26mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.76kg/8.3lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent price
+ Hefty yet eminently playable neck
+ Classic look

- Tonally a little generic

The great neck and a selection of vintage single-coil tones mean the Cutlass CT50 is certainly worth checking out

7/10

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VOLUME
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Squier Vintage Modified Baritone & Deluxe Jazzmasters

A surf classic rebooted via a near-vintage replica and a long-necked behemoth with an identity crisis... **ED MITCHELL** investigates

Most of us could write a PhD on the Fender Stratocaster and Telecaster by now without breaking a sweat. Leo Fender's world-changing bursts of inspiration have been documented, discussed and debated in exhaustive detail. Of course, as annoying 1980s comedian Jimmy Cricket was fond of saying... "there's more".

Launched in 1958, the Fender Jazzmaster was another Leo triumph, a slightly over-engineered beast with a complex wiring loom and vibrato unit that became tonal meth to countless surf guitarists, not to mention Elvis Costello, J Mascis of Dinosaur Jr (with his signature Squier Jazzmaster) and Johnny Cash sideman Luther Perkins.

The freshly-hatched Squier Deluxe Jazzmaster and Vintage Modified Baritone Jazzmaster we have here capitalise on their ancestor's popularity, with the same offset chassis, albeit chiselled from basswood. Jazzmaster DNA is also splashed all over the bolt-on C-profile maple necks and 9.5-inch rosewood fingerboards – and those big single-coil pickups.

The Deluxe Jazzmaster concept couldn't be simpler. Take a timeless classic, one that usually strips your savings account like some ne'er do well cyber scammer, and scale down the production costs without compromising on the eye candy. On that front, the Jazzmaster scores big with the glint of its one-ply gold anodised aluminium scratchplate and a big headstock that plays host to a set of old-school Kluson-style tuners. You also get that overly complex but undeniably cool-looking vibrato (no, not 'tremolo', Mr Fender) with the long arm and an adjustment screw for tension. We're not blown away by the Adjusto-matic bridge here – it doesn't quite follow the radius of the fingerboard and doesn't look as vintage-correct as the original Jazzmaster bridge. A hardtail version, the ST, is available at the same price.

The Deluxe's vintage credentials have been further usurped, with 21 medium jumbo frets and that 9.5-inch radius board for easier bends above the 12th fret. The back of the neck has a slick satin finish to help you move around when your palm gets a bit sticky.

While it shares the 9.5-inch radius of the Deluxe model, the Vintage Modified Baritone Jazzmaster has a longer 30-inch scale length, just like the Fender Bass VI – used by The Beatles, Cream's Jack Bruce and others – and the shortscale Mustang Bass.

This thing is like the current Ford Mustang muscle car. The modern paint job and black hardware barely disguise this beast's vintage roots. It's undeniably cool, but we can't help wondering why Fender has gone to all the trouble of building a baritone with modern metal looks then slapped in a pair of single-coil pickups. Fender has ceased production of the rather 'Marmite' 70s Antigua finish option, which at least offered more of a vintage vibe, but then there's also a Vintage Modified Bass VI available at £425.

Other Baritone Jazzmaster selling points include a rosewood fingerboard with 21 medium jumbo frets and rolled edges, a simple control layout (master volume, master tone, three-way pickup switch) and what looks uncannily like a Danelectro bridge. Before we plug >

The Baritone's twangy bridge pickup is perfect for deep, resonant chord playing

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Deluxe Jazzmaster With Tremolo

Squier offers other affordable Jazzmasters, including the hardtail version of our Deluxe and the **J Mascis Signature £500**, which is just about identical in spec to our review guitar. If you're on a tighter budget, check out the twin-humbucker loaded **Squier Affinity Jazzmaster HH** at **£195** a pop. If you're hooked on retro, you need to look at the Eastwood range. The twin-bucker, vibrato-equipped **Airline Map DLX** throws some of the coolest vintage shadows at a shade under **£600**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage Modified Baritone Jazzmaster

If you like the baritone concept but want to treat your eyeballs to some old-school good looks, the **Squire Vintage Modified Bass VI £425** is the business. Three single coils, whammy, block fingerboard inlays... it's all gravy. Of course, Kings of kitsch **Danelectro** offer the seriously cool **Baritone** guitar. For **£549** you get the iconic semi-hollow Masonite body, a pair of lipstick pickups and a choice of black and silver metal-flake finishes. Too cool, man. The **Gretsch G5265 Jet Baritone** is another fine contender, complete with licensed Bigsby at **£429**.

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

in, both guitars play great with a comfortable action and no choking or buzzing.

In use

Tonally, the Deluxe is everything we expected, although the wiring loom can be confusing. You get a conventional volume and tone control for the lead (bridge) pickup, and a roller volume and tone for the rhythm circuit on the guitar's upper bout. There's also a three-way pickup selector toggle and a two-way lead/rhythm slider switch. We don't have the space here to go chapter and verse on this, but it's worth noting that the rhythm circuit is noticeably darker – presumably aimed at the jazz players who never gave the guitar the time of day in the end.

Moving on, the bridge pickup is bright and twangy and laps up springy reverb like a good 'un. If you're thinking of dipping your toe into surf guitar, this is a great place to start. Introducing the neck pickup into the mix adds some depth to the tone, which works well for rockabilly and rhythm work. As you'd expect, the neck pickup solo is the warmest spot on the guitar. It offers a booming twang that partners well with vibrato arm dips, yet engage the rhythm mode and you get a much deeper tone.

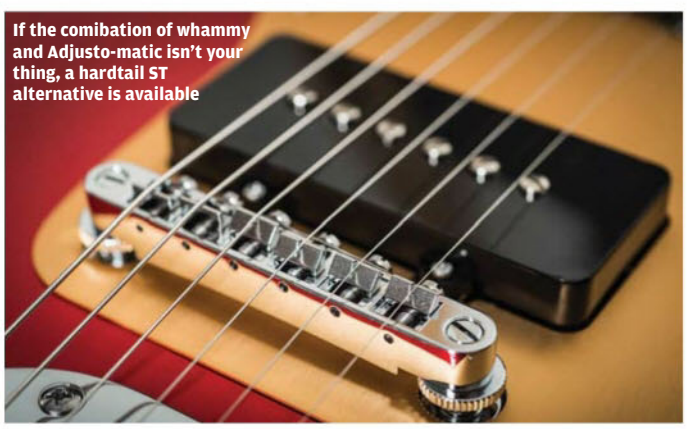
Adding some 60s-style fuzz or more refined valve-like overdrive reveals another Jazzmaster trait; few guitars cut through a mix like an angry Jazz, and string separation is also impressive. It's a more tightly defined tonal response than the shorter-scale Jaguar, and the pickups provide way more beef than its short-arse cousin.

You get all the cool bits of owning a classic Jazzmaster without the price. The thing just looks and plays great

The Baritone is in A to A tuning (low to high: A, D, G, C, E, A). Yes, it does a decent job of thumping out heavily distorted bottom-string riffs, not unlike a fuzzed-up bass in fact, but it's at its happiest on a clean setting – especially when partnered with old-school effects such as reverb and tremolo. Running through the pickup switch reveals increasing levels of depth and darkness, but we love the throaty twang of the bridge unit. It's here that you'll bag a fistful of that Ennio Morricone soundtrack vibe, cheesy old spy movie stuff and that deep resonant sound on Glen Campbell's *Wichita Lineman* and *Galveston*.

The Deluxe Jazzmaster 'With Tremolo' knows exactly why it's here. You get all the cool bits of owning a classic Jazzmaster without the big price tag. Build quality is the business and the thing just looks and plays great, holds its tuning and pumps out a wealth of very acceptable tones. The Baritone Jazzmaster feels a bit less sure of itself. In its 'none more black' guise at least, the look may be too intimidating for the Americana and country crowd, yet its tonal palette will be too polite for metalheads.

While the Deluxe Jazzmaster is proof of just how good Squier guitars are these days, the Baritone is an example of a company that isn't afraid to take chances, even with its more affordable guitars. At £350, you can afford to take a chance too...



If the comibation of whammy and Adjusto-matic isn't your thing, a hardtail ST alternative is available

KEY FEATURES

Squier Deluxe Jazzmaster

- **PRICE** £350 (no gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar, made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Offset and contoured basswood body, Modern-C profile bolt-on maple neck with 9.5-inch (241mm) radius rosewood fingerboard, 21 medium jumbo frets, gold anodised aluminium scratchplate, chrome vintage vibrato with Adjusto-matic bridge and vintage Kluson-style machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Squier single-coil pickups
- **CONTROLS** Rhythm/lead slider switch; lead circuit: volume, tone, 3-way switch; rhythm circuit: voume & tone controls
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Candy Apple Red (as reviewed)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.6kg/8.12lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 www.fender.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Good-quality tones
+ Excellent playability
+ Affordable vintage mojo

– No gigbag, and we'd prefer a traditional Jazzmaster bridge...

A lot of guitar for £350. The spec sheet is almost perfect – few guitars look this cool for the money

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Squier Vintage Modified Baritone Jazzmaster

- **PRICE** £350 (no gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string baritone guitar. made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Offset contoured basswood body, Modern-C profile bolt-on maple neck with 9.5-inch (241mm) radius rosewood fingerboard, 21 medium jumbo frets, block inlays, black hardware including Dano-style hardtail bridge and vintage Kluson-style machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Duncan Designed JM-101 single coils
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, master tone, three-way toggle
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Transparent Black (as reviewed), Antigua (at extra cost)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 762mm/30"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 38mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.2kg/7.13lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great playability
+ Sounds fantastic clean
+ Good value for money

– Metalheads would prefer fire-breathing humbuckers

Probably the best baritone at this price point, but some more finish options would give it wider appeal

7/10

amazon.co.uk
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BASS
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REVERB
RETURN
CONTOUR
Two-Rock
Classic
Reverb
Signature
ON
STANDBY
Two-Rock
Fender
STRATOCASTER

Two-Rock Classic Reverb Signature

Joe Bonamassa and John Mayer are among those who have used Two-Rock's Dumble-inspired wonder machines. **HUW PRICE** finds out how the latest incarnation of the Classic Reverb stacks up

It's estimated that Alexander 'Howard' Dumble made around 300 amplifiers before he retired in the late 90s. They were in such short supply that new ones were cheaper than old ones – so long as you were prepared to wait several years for your amp to be built. These days, genuine Dumbles cost tens of thousands of pounds.

Since Dumble was never speedy with repair work, some owners took their amps to techs for running repairs. Given Dumble's reputation amongst elite players, it's not surprising that some enterprising techs took the opportunity to reverse engineer the amps they were working on.

Before long, several were building Dumble clones – to the understandable consternation of Mr Dumble, who began protecting his circuitry secrets with epoxy resin. Unfortunately, it was all too late – and Two-Rock was among the first of the boutique amp builders to clone and subsequently develop Dumble's designs with onboard spring reverb and buffered effects loops.

Everything from the silver-skirted knobs to the shape and style will leave you in no doubt as to what this 50W/100W 6L6-powered head is all about. With the company again independently owned and founder Bill Krinard back on board, the CRS is upgraded with, amongst other things, a three-way gain structure switch for input stage voicing and a bigger output transformer; this head is almost as heavy as its matching vertical speaker cabinet with two Celestion G12-65s (£999).

Several features complement an array of familiar controls. First up is a FET buffer stage that can boost or lower the input level and can be switched in or out from the front panel or footswitch. There are three switches to increase brightness and boost the midrange and bass/low-mid frequency bands. Eq1/eq2 toggles between two equalisation settings to match clean and overdriven tones, and there's a footswitchable equalisation bypass feature that boosts the level and midrange.

The footswitchable reverb has send and return controls, with the former affecting effect saturation and decay time. Finally, a three-way gain structure switch changes the sensitivity and feel of the preamp, and a 50-watt half-power switch can be engaged without >

It has the sweet response and touch sensitivity we associate with small amps, even when it's blowing the bloody doors off

Big iron: huge transformers account for the amplifier's physical and tonal weight

KEY FEATURES

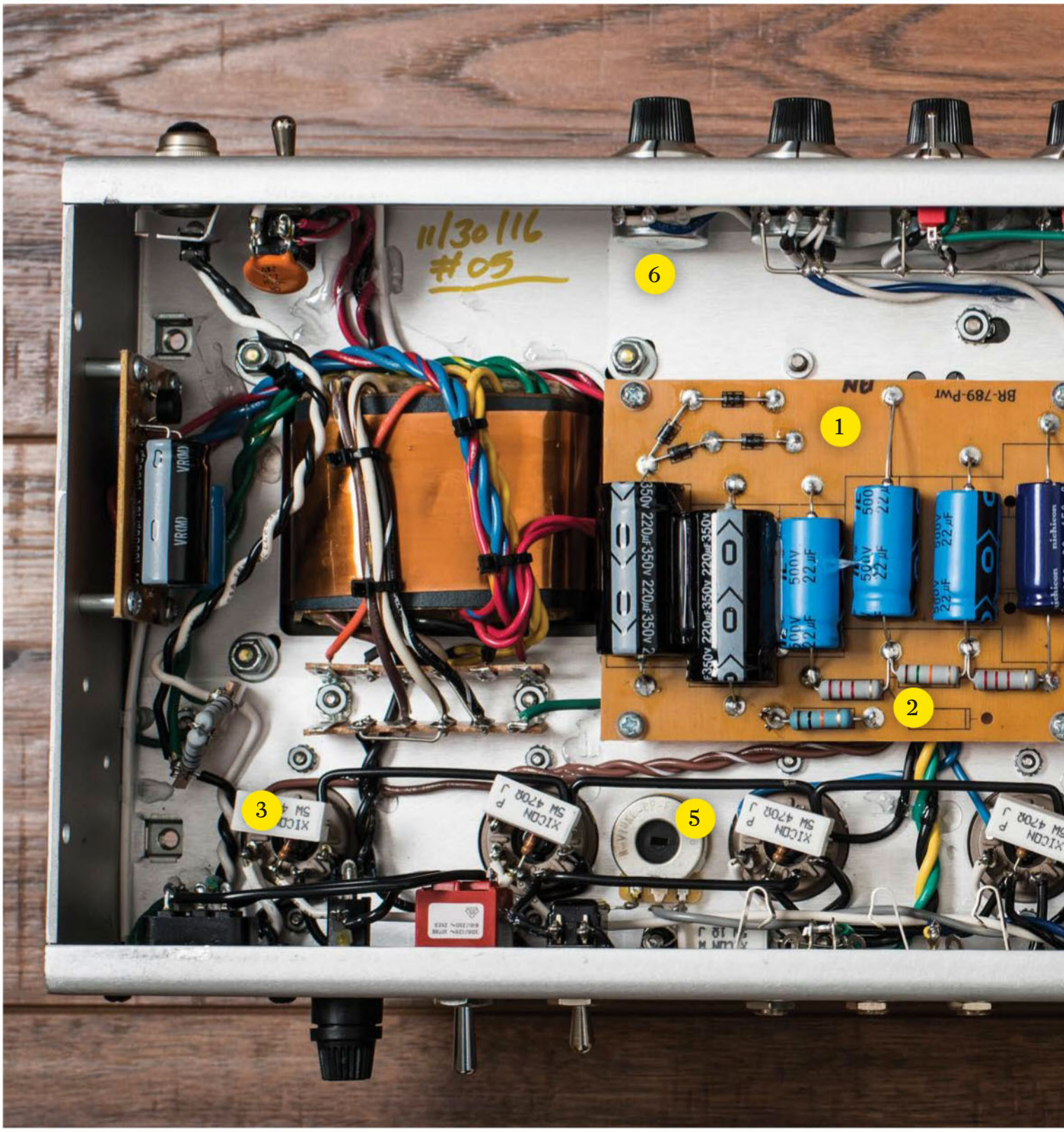
- **PRICE** £4,299 (inc footwitch)
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel fixed-bias valve head with spring reverb, built in USA
- **POWER RATING** 50W/100W
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 4x 6L6
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input socket, FET gain, treble, middle, bass, gain, master, send, return & contour (knobs). FET, bright, mid, deep, eq1/eq2, gain structure (3-way), bypass, standby (switches)
- **REAR PANEL** 2x 4-ohm & 1x 8-ohm speaker outputs, 50W/100W power switch, effects loop send & return, footswitch cable socket, fuse, IEC socket
- **SPEAKER** A matching vertical 2x12 cabinet loaded with Celestion G12-65 drivers is available for £999
- **DIMENSIONS** 578x304x270mm
- **WEIGHT** 19.5kg/43lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 **www.coda-music.com** **www.two-rock.com**

Anatomy of...

1 Rock on wood
Two-Rock uses fibre circuit board material, but Dumble occasionally assembled his circuits on wooden substrates

2 Solid as a Rock
High-wattage precision resistors are used in the power supply for consistency and long service life

3 Hot Rock
Where parts of the circuit are susceptible to heat damage, Two-Rock plays it safe with over-spec'd components such as these 5-watt wire-wound resistors



4 Rock 'til you drop
Dumble used Sprague Orange Drop signal capacitors, so it's hardly surprising that Two-Rock has followed suit

5 For those about Two-Rock
The four 6L6 power valves operate in fixed-bias mode, and this trim pot makes it simple for a tech to adjust the bias setting

6 Easy Two replace
Like the valve sockets, the potentiometers are all chassis-mounted, and therefore easily replaced in the unlikely event of failure

The FET buffer stage can be switched in either here on the front panel or via the footswitch

The rear panel houses three speaker outputs, a half-power switch and an effects loop

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
At the time of writing, Reverb had a listing for a **Dumble Overdrive Special** combo **£94,500** and a **Dumble Ultra-Phonix** (modified '69 Fender Bassman) **£32,870**. Highly-rated Dumble clones include the **Bludo-Tone Bludo-Drive $4,150**, the **Glaswerks Overdrive Deluxe $2,950** and the **Pure Sixty-Four Abraxas $3,600**. **CeriaTone** sells a wide range of Dumble-style amps in pre-built and kit form **$375-$1,495**.

In use

It's all so 1970s – enormous, heavy, intimidatingly loud and causing pulled muscles in your back before you've even started playing. A twinge of nostalgia that can be cured only by Ibuprofen. That established, let's batten down the hatches, lock the front door to keep the neighbours and Henry Kaiser from gatecrashing the party, and get started.

When confronted with amps with complex controls and multiple switches, we've often spent more time dialling in a usable tone than actually playing the thing. In contrast, working through this amp's raft of controls and switches is more an enjoyable voyage of discovery than a necessary chore. It's also dangerous because it has the sweet response and touch sensitivity we normally associate with small amps, even when it's blowing the bloody doors off. If your ears start ringing, the damage is done.

The CRS is a complex amp, but however you set it, the fantastic tones just keep on coming. It feels more like using studio equipment to enhance an already great guitar sound, because the tones sound 'produced' but never processed.

Regardless of gain levels, the defining themes are punch and transparency. Without being excessively bright, you get the sense that you can hear your guitar – and by extension yourself – way better than usual. We should also emphasise that punchiness shouldn't be equated with spikiness, but rather an unusually articulate definition that holds true regardless of gain settings. Even when it's up loud, you'll still feel like digging in hard just to hear the CRS' natural compression.

Chords ring true and there's always a hint of grit in the cream to remind you that the CRS is a rock 'n' roll amp

The CRS isn't the type of amp you should think about dialling in for a blues, country or hard rock tone, because it's not really genre specific. Instead, it's more about making your guitar's natural voice tone sweeter, clearer and more responsive than it has ever been before – regardless of gain levels. So whatever you need, you'll almost certainly find it.

Oddly enough, once we had settled on a setting that suited us, we found we were able to swap from guitar to guitar without needing to adjust the amp. Rather than waltzing through the seemingly infinite permutations provided by the switches and knobs, you end up focusing on the important thing: making music.

The gain range is wide but not extreme, so super-saturated fuzz tones aren't on the menu. Many of us resort to high gain to get the sustain we need, but with this amp it's unnecessary. The CRS hangs onto every note tenaciously before working its magic on the harmonic overtones to create that elusive 'bloom' Les Paul fans often refer to. With this amp, you can do it with any guitar. Chords ring true, single notes flow together and fast runs never deteriorate into an indistinct blur. Best of all, there's always a hint of grit in the cream to remind you that the CRS is a rock 'n' roll amp.

Some years ago, while reviewing a high-end acoustic, this writer was struck by the realisation that a great instrument can make you a better player. Things you struggle to accomplish on lesser guitars will come easier and, freed from physical constraints, you're able to play more expressively. This amp does the same for our electric playing – but it's a double-edged sword because the Two-Rock's extreme clarity leaves you with no place to hide.

As we gain experience, we tend to figure out what works best for us – it might be a big clean pedal platform amp or a small, squishy combo to crank up at home. Having pretty much decided where we sit on the spectrum (so to speak), this writer never really considered himself a Dumble sort of player – it turns out he may have been all along. Although the CRS is far from cheap, it's a world-class tone machine at a fraction of the cost of the legendary amps that inspired it.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Exceptional tone and wide gain range
+ Sophisticated controls
+ Outstanding touch dynamics
+ Superb clarity and definition

– Spring reverb circuit is perhaps a tad underwhelming

It's undoubtedly one for the discerning and well-heeled player, but the Classic Reverb Signature is the sort of amplifier that could be a real game changer

9/10

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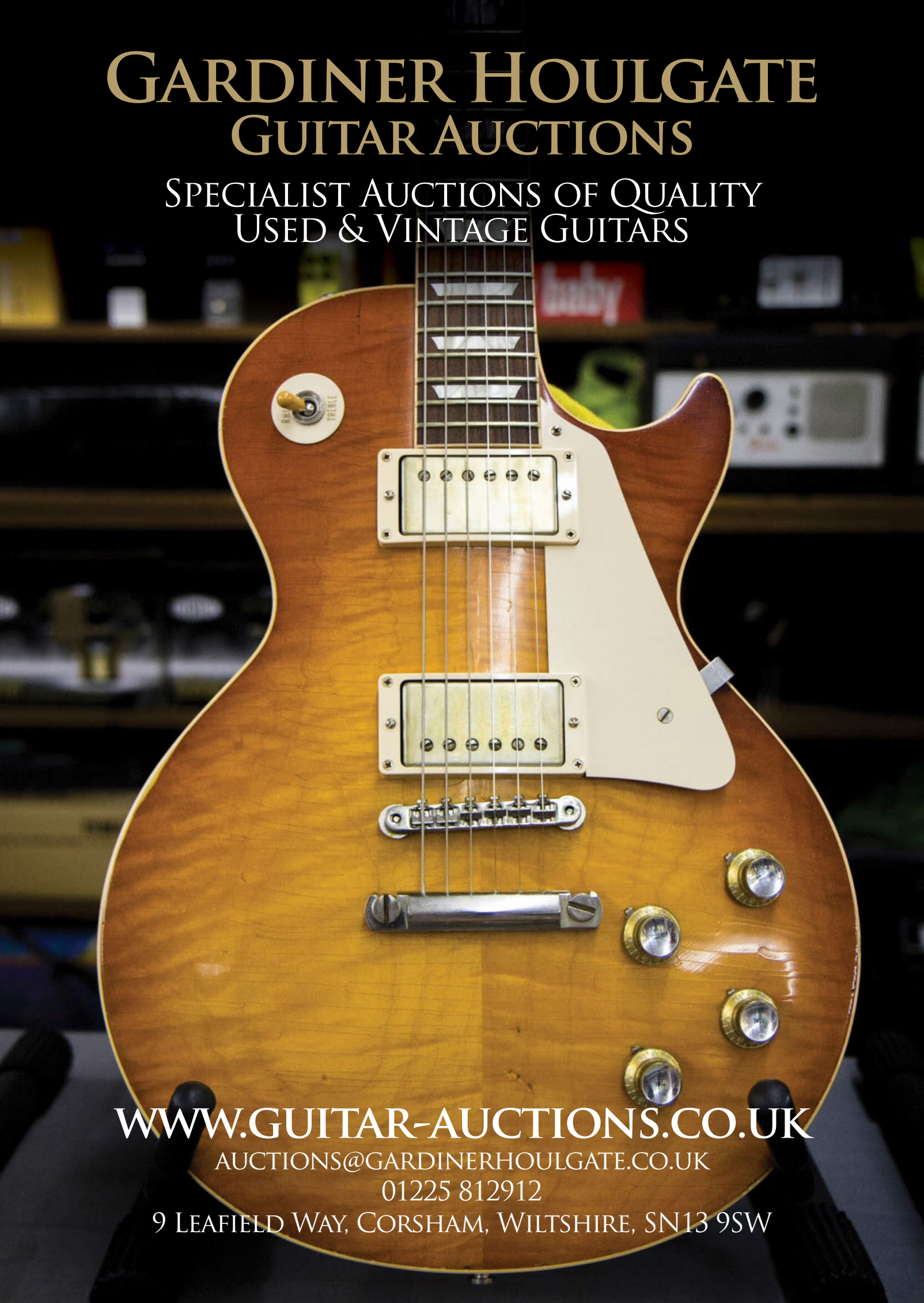

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ThorpyFX Chain Home

Our favourite military pedal boffin launches his new Reimagined Series with a percussive tremolo. Is **RICHARD PURVIS** feeling the beat?

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

The JEN/Vox Repeat Percussion may be an obscure unit, but that hasn't stopped a number of modern makers from paying tribute. Your options include the **Magnetic Effects Electrochop £109**, **EarthQuaker Devices Hummingbird £159** and **North Effects Repeat Percussion £65**. There was one Vox original going for £170 on reverb.com at the time of writing.

Before the outbreak of World War Two, the RAF began constructing a network of radar stations along the British coastline to give early warnings of airborne raiders. They gave it the codename Chain Home. The things you learn in *G&B*, eh?

Now, combine this information with Adrian Thorpe's experience in bomb disposal for the British Army and the name of his latest ThorpyFX stompbox starts to seem a little less peculiar. But while the idea of signal transmitters might suggest a bucket-brigade delay, this is actually a tremolo... of sorts. Inspired by the Repeat Percussion unit that first appeared in the Vox catalogue in 1968, it's designed to sound much more sharply percussive than a standard trem effect. And there's more to it than that, because the two knobs on the left control the level and tone of an added clean boost circuit.

Housed in one of Thorpy's familiar tank-like metal enclosures, this time with green-painted flanks, the Chain Home is the first in a new range of retro-inspired pedals called the Reimagined Series. The second, in fact, has already been and gone: limited to 100 units, the Veteran Germanium (think Fuzz Face and Rangemaster in one extra-wide chassis) sold out on pre-orders.

In use

The best way to explain what this tremolo effect sounds like might be to describe what it looks like – because

the key is in the waveform. With the depth at full, one sustained chord comes out looking more like a series of kick-drum beats than a gently pulsating guitar – the wave is super-steep in the attack and not much slower to decay, and the result is the most poundingly rhythmic sound your guitar will ever make. If you want that translated into onomatopoeia, it's something like pam-pam-pam-pam.

The speed range is generous, from unmusically slow to judderingly fast (though it stops short of ring modulator robotics), with a sweet zone around the 1pm mark that's quite tight for fine adjustments. Even with the depth control dialled back, you're not going to play a whole set with this thing on; but as a feature effect it is monstrously cool.

The boost, meanwhile, is more versatile than you might expect. With the tone at maximum, it adds a substantial kick across the full frequency range, but turn this control to the left and it begins to filter out the bass (the pot is labelled 'low end' on the circuit board). You can use this to prevent your boosted signal getting too bloomy, or to get something more like a classic treble booster.

A smidgeon of boost can be handy to stop the tremolo dropping your overall level when the depth is set high

Do the two halves of the Chain Home get on together? Yes indeed. A smidgeon of boost can be handy to stop the tremolo dropping your overall level when the depth is set high, and can also add dynamism to the effect when it's pushing a low-headroom amp – blast out your meanest chords at maximum output and the pulses will be almost completely compressed out, only to creep back to the fore as the level drops away.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Distinctive and likeable tremolo effect
+ Tweakable clean boost is equally good
+ Built like a chunk of military ordnance

- It's a shame it can't be sync'd digitally to a beat
- A more 'niche' effect than we're used to from Thorpy

This is a slightly odd combo of psychedelic tremolo and rock-solid boost, but they're both pretty great and combine effectively

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Thorpy FX Chain Home

- **PRICE** £199
- **DESCRIPTION** Percussive tremolo and clean boost pedal, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Boost tone and level, tremolo depth and rate
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 145x70x60mm
- **CONTACT** ThorpyFX **thorpyfx.com**

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Valentine

Designed in collaboration with James Valentine (Maroon 5) the *Valentine* combines a mix of classic aesthetics and innovative engineereing. Featuring a tapered slab ash-body, two Music Man designed pickups (humbucker/single coil) with a coil tap and boost, hardtail bridge with vintage bent steel saddles, 25.5" scale, roasted maple neck with 10" radius maple fingerboard and a oversized 4-over-2 headstock with compensated nut. Crafted in 4 finishes. **music-man.com**

Keeley Loomer & Dark Side

HUW PRICE has flashbacks to his studio-engineer past thanks to a pair of 'Workstation' pedals from Robert Keeley that promise to be a one-stop shop for David Gilmour and shoegaze fans...

Superficially, this might seem like an odd pairing – post-hippy prog meets late-80s shoegaze – but then again, the eras had certain similarities. Long unkempt hair, disheveled clothes, angsty withdrawn young men, mind-altering substances and groundbreaking guitar tones with a strong focus on fuzz.

These days, shoegaze may feel more like a fondly remembered footnote, but for many it was the perfect antidote for the metal and poodle rock that had poisoned the guitar pool in the 80s. You could even make a reasonable case that shoegaze, along with grunge, marked the end for ultra-processed digitally derived guitar tones and restored valve amps and stompboxes to their rightful places in the gear hierarchy.

Prog and shoegaze sounds were often crafted skillfully using vintage guitars and amps and a combination of stompbox and studio effects. These now-classic guitar tones can be amongst the trickiest to emulate without insider knowledge of which effects combinations were used and how they were configured.

Has Robert Keeley been able to take the guesswork out of it and pack everything you need for early-70s Pink Floyd and late-80s My Bloody Valentine into one-box solutions? Let's find out.

Loomer

First, an admission – this writer spent the first few weeks of 1990 holed up in a studio recording My Bloody Valentine's *Glider* EP and rejoined them later that year for some *Loveless* sessions. Two guitars were used on *Glider* – Kevin Shields' Burgundy Mist Jazzmaster and a borrowed '64 sunburst Jaguar. The vintage amps were a Marshall JTM45 and a Vox AC30, and both came from Phil Harris' hire company.

We were witness to Kevin using a fuzzbox on just one occasion – a Tone Bender to record bass through an Ampeg SVT. All the guitar overdrive came from the amps, although Kevin did set up a gated backwards reverb effect on the studio's Yamaha SPX90, and he mentioned he could dial in the same effect using an Alesis MidiVerb.

In contrast to his studio approach, it seems Kevin's live setup always included pedals, and these days they are spread out across three boards. The Loomer distills everything down to a fuzzbox and a reverb/delay. The fuzz side has a three-way equalisation switch in addition to a high-pass filter. The other side also has a three-way switch to vary the effect, and there's a switch to determine whether the fuzz or reverb comes first in the signal path.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Loomer

The **DigiTech XDV DigiVerb £90** is a popular choice for reverse reverb amongst MBV enthusiasts, and you could combine it with a **Roger Mayer Classic Fuzz £215**, but you'll have to use the whammy bar for pitch shifting.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Dark Side

Although a board with an **MXR Uni-Vibe £129**, **EHX Electric Mistress £110**, **MXR Phase 90 £86**, **Stymon Lex £275**, **Catalinbread Echorec £185** and an **EHX Big Muff £75** would give you more combinations and control than the Dark Side, you can do the maths.

In use

The function of the decay and depth controls depends on which mode is selected. Focus is a series of close echoes over reverb that repeat in a seemingly random and arrhythmic manner. The time is pre-set, but decay sets the number of repeats and depth contributes a swirly vibrato. The tone is fairly bright and bathroom-y, but grainy and lo-fi too. The fixed delay time isn't an issue because it sits under strummed parts to create beautiful floaty pads that don't interfere rhythmically or harmonically.

Hall is a reverb effect where decay sets the reverb time and depth introduces a harmoniser effect on the tails, two octaves above the fundamental frequency. It's particularly effective with clean arpeggios and harmonics, sounding more Slowdive than MBV.

Reverse is a reverb that comes via a delay line, with each repeat swelling up to create an effect that sounds backwards but isn't. Decay sets the interval between repeats, while depth sets the intensity of a pitch bend effect that responds to the envelope of the guitar signal.

It's a laudable attempt to replicate electronically Kevin Shields' trademark technique of continuously manipulating the vibrato arm while playing. It actually works well enough, particularly at shorter decay settings, and responds in a way that feels quite natural.

The fuzz element can operate independently, and it sounds as if it's based on a Fuzz Face or Roger Mayer-style pedal. It cleans up pretty well, and with the guitar flat out it's raucous, growling and clear. It's a perfectly decent fuzz that, like the reverb/vibrato side, produces a range of enjoyable and usable effects. Individually, the two sides may not quite set the world on fire but the real magic happens when they're combined to create a wall of ambient distortion that undeniably captures the shoegaze spirit.

Dark Side

Inside the Dark Side's enclosure, there's an analogue fuzz and a 24-bit DSP engine for the rotary speaker, Uni-Vibe, phaser, flanger and Binson-style echo effects. Again, the fuzz has a three-position mid contour switch and there's a switch to flip the order of the effects. The controls on the left side are multi-function and depend on which mode is selected.

In use

Although the Dark Side's fuzz has the same three-position equalisation switch, it's voiced differently to the Loomer's. It's a smoother and more velvety sustain to assist in recreating Gilmour's languid legato style, and it's no surprise to learn it's based on an op-amp-driven Big Muff circuit. Our EHX Little Big Muff sounds smoother, fatter and very slightly clearer than the Dark Side fuzz, but Muffs are inconsistent and Keeley's circuit is a variation on the theme with tighter lows.

Flange mode is polite and tasteful rather than sweepy and extreme, but it's all the more useful for it, and the rotary speaker effect sounds convincing at slow to medium-fast rate settings. Similarly, the phaser effect is smooth and full but not overpowering, and the Uni-Vibe simulation delivers authentic Hendrix- and Trower-inspired fun.

The real stand-out is the Binson echo simulation with 12 preset 'head' combinations for seemingly endless multi-tap echoes with subtle pitch modulation and the facility to generate and control feedback. Played clean, you can lose yourself for hours in rhythmic loops, or you can hit the fuzz for soaring leads.

Given a straight choice between the Dark Side and a pedalboard of individual effects, we might choose the latter for the extra scope and ease of switching on the fly. However, it certainly impresses as a single-box, small-footprint solution for Gilmour-esque sounds, and its practical limitations wouldn't be an issue in a recording scenario where you'd have time to switch between modulation options and finesse the effects.

The Dark Side has perhaps the broadest appeal of these two pedals because it isn't so easily pigeonholed. Even if you're not a Gilmour fan, you can enjoy all the effects for what they are. The Loomer is more of a niche product that, by successfully delivering on its promises, is limited as a multi-function effects unit in comparison.

Played clean, you can lose yourself for hours in rhythmic loops, or you can hit the fuzz for soaring leads

KEY FEATURES

Loomer

- **PRICE** £301
- **DESCRIPTION** Combination delay, reverb and fuzz pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Blend, decay, warmth, depth, filter, fuzz & level knobs, focus/reverse/hall & flat/full/scoop, order switches,
- **FEATURES** Powered by 9v centre-negative power supply, expression pedal input
- **DIMENSIONS** 95x120x35mm
- **CONTACT** www.robertkeeley.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Impressive fuzz
+ Useful fuzz voicing switch
+ Wide range of distinctive reverb and modulation sounds

– No battery power

It's shoegaze in a stompbox but, unlike the fuzz, the reverb/delay side isn't as impressive as a standalone effect

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Dark Side

- **PRICE** £301
- **DESCRIPTION** Combination flanger, rotary speaker, phaser, Uni-Vibe, delay and fuzz pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Level, blend/tape head, depth/time, filter, rate/feedback, filter, fuzz, level, flange/rotary/delay/phase/u-vibe, flat/full/scoop, order switches
- **FEATURES** Powered by 9v centre-negative power supply, expression pedal input
- **DIMENSIONS** 95x120x35mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Fantastic echo
+ Useful fuzz voicing switch
+ Wide range of modulation effects
+ Both sides useful alone or combined

– No battery power

A great-value package of Gilmour-style effects in a small footprint that allows you to innovate as well as emulate

9/10

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Seymour Duncan Palladium & Killing Floor

These US-made pedals offer two very different ways of creating a whole lot of rock... **RICHARD PURVIS** goes playing in the dirt

Pickup magnate Seymour W Duncan sneaked sideways into the stompbox business by releasing a pedal with the word 'pickup' in its name. Nobody seemed to mind, and so 14 years after the launch of the original Pickup Booster we now have 12 Duncan stompers to choose from. Among the latest crop are these two intimidating beasts. They could hardly be more different – one has a single control knob, the other has nine – but they both have the same intention: to take your clean guitar signal and turn it into something your grandmother won't like at all.

Palladium

Seymour Duncan doesn't want you to think of this as a mere overdrive pedal – it's a 'gain stage'. The idea is to add a fully featured second channel to your amplifier (you can even use it as a preamp for a standalone power amp), complete with a switchable boost. There's a three-band active EQ section with sweepable mids, plus a presence control that cuts and boosts way above the treble at around 5.2kHz. Finally, there's a dial marked resonance for adjusting how heavily the lower frequencies are distorted.

The Palladium uses a combination of low-noise op-amps and germanium clipping diodes, and does not have a battery compartment – it runs off a nine-volt power supply, which will need to be ready to pump out 180mA of current. That's an awful lot for an analogue unit, isn't it? But there is an awful lot going on inside this one...

In use

Are you ready for some gentle jazz-pop stylings? You shouldn't be – the chemical element palladium is a heavy metal, and we don't think they chose that name by accident. Plugging it

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Palladium Gain Stage

The **Keeley Tone Workstation** **£299** does a similar job to the Palladium by combining two overdrives, a boost and a compressor, while the **Tonebone Trimode** **£318** is an all-in-one rock machine with an ECC83 valve at its heart. If you really like playing with knobs and switches, try the **Empress Multidrive** **£315**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Killing Floor High Gain Boost

The **Supro Boost** **£199** is a fine preamp-pusher with similar switching options to the Killing Floor, while the **Orange Two Stroke** **£119** brings much more tone-sculpting capability than most. Then there's the **Seymour Duncan Pickup Booster** **£130**, with EQ tweaks more focused on the midrange.

in between a Les Paul and a clean blackface amp, with the gain fully off and all other controls at noon, we discover quickly that there's no such thing as low-gain crunch in the world of the Palladium. It's already rocking out, with loads of heft and sustain, and our first question is whether the gain might be stuck on maximum.

Nope, it isn't – there's plenty more on tap. But we ought to have a quick look at the manual before we dive any deeper into this festival of filth. The controls are clear enough, but there are just so many of them, and the effects of changing the EQ in particular are so dramatic that the six sample settings provide some welcome navigation. They can be broken down very roughly into two from the 80s, two from the 90s and two from the modern era. All share one common feature – lots of big, smooth, furry distortion – but the range of tones they cover is impressive, from grinding alt-rock to pure hair metal. It's just a shame this is a one-channel device, so you can't switch from one to another.

You could argue that the most fundamental factor in defining the character of a rock-guitar voice is the midrange, and that's where being able to cut or boost 12dB at any frequency you like comes in extra handy. The Palladium will scoop with the best of them. The resonance control has an interesting part to play here, too – turned to the left it seems to squish out the lower mids for a different kind of scooping, while to the right it lets through more natural 'clonk'.

The boost comes at the front end of the circuit, so a lot of its decibel-lifting impact is compressed out by the overdrive, but the extra gain it throws into the pot is a real bonus – and it's been voiced with an added dollop of upper mids, Tube Screamer-style, making it ideal for helping solos cut through.

Killing Floor

No need for a chemistry degree to decode the name of this one: it's called the Killing Floor and it's got a picture of someone holding a freshly fired gun on the enclosure. Should be pretty ferocious, then. Well, it's a high-gain boost, and in fact there's another clue by the top end of the dial: 34dB, which is rather a lot. We can't think of many clean boost pedals that pack this much power, although the Keeley Katana pips it by a single decibel.

Seymour Duncan's own Pickup Booster goes up 'only' to 25dB, but this is not just a louder version of that: where the PB's three-way switch offers two levels of mids-fattening for single coils, this one lets you either boost the treble at 10kHz or cut it at 4.8kHz. It uses a hybrid JFET/op-amp circuit 'optimised for low-order harmonics' – which should mean it stays pure and fizz-free – but we are warned to expect some overdrive from within the pedal, not just from the front end of the amp it's pushing.

The high boost setting is extremely nice, adding chime without harshness, calling to mind a Vox Top Boost circuit

Build-wise, it's a fairly standard compact stomper, with true bypass and a battery compartment whose plastic cover is easy to open. One PP3 should last you a good few gigs, as the Killing Floor's simple circuit draws only 3.7mA of current.

In use

With the gain at zero and the toggle switch centred, you can tap this thing on and off like a hyperactive child playing Hungry Hippos and barely notice any difference in what comes out of the amp – a good starting point. When we do wind up the boost, it comes without any obvious colouration except for a subtle pepping up of the top end. With single coils at least, flicking to high cut actually brings something closer to a neutral boost – and even chubby humbuckers come through without any unwanted muffling.

The high boost setting is more obviously treated, and it's extremely nice, adding sweet chime without harshness in a way that inevitably calls to mind a Vox Top Boost circuit. We wouldn't be afraid to use this with fairly bright single coils.

So where does the clean boost start getting dirty? It's hard to tell for sure, but by 11 o'clock on the gain control there seems to be some grit creeping in no matter how low the amplifier's preamp is set. At the full 34dB, it's properly roaring, but this is tight, balanced, natural overdrive – let it feed into a preamp that's already close to the edge and... well, maybe this thing isn't so different from the Palladium after all.

KEY FEATURES

Palladium Gain Stage

- **PRICE** £395
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Bass, mid level and frequency, treble, presence, output level, gain, resonance, boost level; bypass and boost footswitches
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9-18V power supply (not supplied); also available in white
- **DIMENSIONS** 141x119x55mm
- **CONTACT** Rosetti 01376 550033 **seymourduncan.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Masses of thick, meaty distortion
+ Simple to use, yet also hugely versatile
+ Boost is voiced nicely for solos

– You could get two or three great boutique overdrives for the same price

The price is daunting, but this is an adventure playground of high gain

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Killing Floor High Gain Boost

- **PRICE** £210
- **DESCRIPTION** Boost pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Gain, high boost/cut switch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V battery or mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 130x66x54mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Works well as an uncoloured boost
+ Can provide some classy overdrive
+ Really useful to be able to adjust the treble content

– It's a shame we can't have this and the Pickup Booster's fattening effect in one pedal

All the boost you could ever need, with the option of added sparkle

8/10

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Peavey MiniMax & MiniMega

Looking for a portable bass amp with a range of tonal flavours? **GARETH MORGAN** checks out two Mini contenders from Peavey

Peavey has been churning out solid, reliable bass gear for many years, with the emphasis squarely on value for money. This month, we have two of its latest offerings, the MiniMax and MiniMega.

Manufactured in China, both amplifiers are housed in a rugged steel chassis, the solid-state Max rated at 500 watts and the Class D Mega a whopping 1,000 watts. Aside from overall size and weight, the main differences come in the form of their respective control panels, which imbue each amplifier with a distinct vibe.

The Max's five white chickenhead dials, comprising volume, gain and a three-band EQ, are all simplicity and retro cool. The row of black buttons underneath comprise TT (TransTrube) boost, punch (+6dB @100Hz), mid shift (from 600Hz to 250Hz) and bright (+10dB above 1kHz). You can enhance bottom end via the switchable Psychoacoustics effect, and there's also a chromatic tuner that mutes the amp when in use. Aside from active and passive jack sockets, you also get aux in and headphone mini jacks.

It's a contemporary and far more complex picture with the multiple black knobs and numerous switches on the Mega's control panel, which also boasts useful back-lighting. Alongside the gain and volume, you'll find a four-band EQ that includes a semi-parametric midrange, with Narrow Q switches for more variation. Other controls cover compression and Peavey's Kosmos bass enhancement processor (effectively a sub-octaver). Aside from various on/offs, there are also crunch (distortion), punch (+4dB @100kHz), bright (+10dB @10kHz) and mute switches, plus an additional mini jack socket for headphones.

The respective rear panels both feature an FX loop, balanced DI XLR out and dual Speakon/jack hybrid speaker outputs, with the Mega also having tuner, TRS jack sockets and a midi footswitch socket.

Sounds

Both amplifiers' basic sounds are really rather good, with plenty of depth, excellent full-range clarity, stacks of lively harmonics and a solid midrange with no bias. The simplicity of the Max's EQ makes it easy to tweak, with plenty of room-shaking boom, snappy mid punch and slicing highs easily accessible. The punch and bright switches add weight and aggression that we'd be loathe to do without, and boosting the middle with the shift enabled unearths a darker, more rubbery tone. Both the Psychoacoustics and TT boost functions are subtle, the former creating a bass shadow beneath your playing and the latter inducing useful valve-like grind.

Although a more daunting prospect, the Mega has more options for tonal shaping. It's fat, solid and musical, and reproduces the sound of your bass without colouring it in any way. Activating the punch and bright controls is similarly addictive, and engaging the EQ accesses serious bottom end and plenty of cut and bite.

The dual midrange controls afford access to darker, boxier tones and brighter, more nasal offerings with plenty of impact; engaging the Narrow Q function focuses and squashes these variations. The octave-type sounds of the Kosmos control may prove useful if synth-bass simulation is required, and the distortion induced via the crunch control gets pleasingly nasty if you hike the gain dial. Both amps deliver a lot of tone in a lightweight package.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Compact, powerful, versatile and portable
+ The usual excellent value for money we expect from Peavey
+ Lots of easy-to-find tonal variations
- The Narrow Q doesn't really add much to the Mega

Excellent lightweight amplifiers. If you want to sound good without fuss, it's the MiniMax. Go Mega if you like more detailed tonal control

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Aguilar's **TH500** **£929** is a 1.8kg/4lbs, 500W belter featuring 4-band EQ with a semi-parametric midrange and drive control. The **EBS Reidmar 750** **£595** has similar features to the TH500, but spits out 750W in a 3.7kg/8.2lbs package. The **Markbass Little Mark 800** **£758** weighs in at 2.9kg/6.4lbs and has a 4-band EQ with a cool VLF filter and 800W of power in the familiar bumble bee livery.

KEY FEATURES
MiniMax

- **PRICE** £409 (inc carry bag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel, 500W solid-state bass amp in a steel chassis. Made in China
- **CONNECTIONS** Active, passive and FX loop jack sockets, aux in and headphones mini jack sockets, twin-hybrid Speakon/jack speaker outs, balanced DI out with pre/post and ground/lift switches.
- **CONTROLS** Gain, bass, middle, treble and volume controls. TT boost, punch, mid shift, bright, Psychoacoustics and tuner/mute switches
- **DIMENSIONS** 274x83x202mm
- **WEIGHT** 2.8kg/6.17lbs
- **CONTACT** Barnes & Mullins 01691 652449 www.**peavey.com**

KEY FEATURES
MiniMega

- **PRICE** £675 (inc carry bag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel, 1,000W digital bass amp in a steel chassis. Made in China
- **CONNECTIONS** Input, FX loop, TRS balanced out and tuner jack sockets, headphones mini jack socket, twin-hybrid Speakon/jack speaker outs, balanced DI out with pre/post, pad and ground/lift switches, midi footswitch socket
- **CONTROLS** Gain, compression, low, 2 stack knobs for low and hi mid frequency and boost/cut, high, stack knob, Kosmos A and C and volume controls. Crunch, comp enable, punch low and hi mid Narrow Q, Kosmos enable and mute switches
- **DIMENSIONS** 302x84x289mm
- **WEIGHT** 4.6kg/10.14lbs

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NEMPHASIS
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Dunlop CBM105Q Cry Baby Bass Mini Wah

Want to add funky wah to your bass sound without sacrificing pedalbord space? **GARETH MORGAN** reports

Wah has been a popular effect with both funk and rock bassists since Bootsy Collins and Geezer Butler turned us on to its gurgly delights way back in the early 70s. Dunlop's 105Q Cry Baby Bass Wah has been around for almost 20 years and yet, while it's unquestionably a splendid unit, it's not exactly compact. The new Cry Baby Bass Mini Wah is the company's solution for bassists with a crowded pedalboard who just can't live without a wah.

The Mini Wah has diminutive dimensions, but don't be fooled – its lightweight aluminium construction is definitely rugged enough to survive being thrown around in the back of the van and on stage. About the size of a standard stompbox, this Cry Baby's shiny white enclosure lends a familiar retro air to proceedings and the grippy rubber on the treadle section completes the connection to its forebear.

There are two tiny, side-mounted black rotary controls for effect volume and adjusting the Q or frequency range coloured by the effect. Simply put, the higher the Q level, the brighter the effected sound. Operation is as you'd imagine – press down the spring-loaded rocker pedal to engage (there's an internal switch at the front of the unit) and release to disengage. Dunlop has kitted out the Mini Wah with auto-return switching, so there's no click when disengaging, but you might notice a slight delay before your clean sound returns. To counter this, removal of the base plate reveals the auto-return delay control in the form of a small white trim pot, and a few minutes of trial-and-error adjusting will get you virtually seamless bypass. The Mini Wah is powered either by mains or, via removal of the base plate, nine-volt battery.

Sounds

Aside from some simple tinkering with the auto return trim pot, the Q control is the real key to getting the most out of this pedal. On the anti-clockwise side, the effect is a more subtle, shimmering sound with a softer attack, peaks that aren't particularly spiky and plenty of natural warmth. High-register noodling is pleasingly guitaristic, and utilising the difference between heel- and toe-down positions makes punchier, more staccato playing funkily impactful.

Rotating the Q control clockwise unearths more snappily aggressive wah with enhanced higher frequencies, although take care near full rotation as it gets a little wild. Being able to switch the effect in and out without fuss makes kicking the Mini Wah in for occasional moments a really creative way to use this rather cool device.

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £119
- **CONTACT** www.jimdunlop.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

The Mini Wah is well built, easy to use and loads of fun. Add one of these to your pedalboard and unleash your inner funk!

9/10

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TONY BACON

Tony Bacon is an author and journalist who writes about musical instruments, musicians, and music. More info at tonybacon.co.uk. His books include *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, *The Gibson 335 Guitar Book*, and *The Ibanez Electric Guitar Book*, and his latest is *The Bass Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of the electric bass guitar.

ALL THAT JAZZ

Old guitar adverts sent TONY BACON on a voyage of jazz discovery. Rather than write off the genre, he advises you take the same journey

Did you see that film, *La La Land*? I wrote here a while ago about the idea of anticipointment, when a film, say, is hyped so much that the anticipation of seeing it is inevitably offset by disappointment when you actually get to see it. *La La Land* is an ambitious musical about the ups and downs of a couple of young wannabes who meet and become friends in the make-or-break city of Los Angeles. One's an actor, the other's a musician. Early on, as they find out about each other, the actor tells the musician she hates jazz. It's a pity, because he loves it: he plays jazz whenever he can, between the cocktail gigs he suffers to try to make some sort of living. So he takes her to a jazz club to try to demonstrate practically why she surely can't hate jazz.

If you like jazz, you'll recognise this motif. The most unlikely people do quite often say they hate jazz, without evidently giving it much thought. It's probably because it scares them. Maybe it's because most music they hear is relatively straightforward, and jazz has the reputation of being difficult. It can be. But "jazz" covers a multitude of styles and types, everything from George Benson to Sonny Sharrock. It's a broad church, to say the least.

One of the ways I got into jazz was through guitar adverts. Back in the 90s, I was researching a guitar book, and I didn't know much about jazz guitarists. I looked back to try to discover which jazzers (and others) played what brands of guitar, and I found a lot of endorsement ads from the 50s and 60s, mostly by Gibson but also a few other big-name US makers.

I came across two from that period that led me to discover a couple of jazz guitarists who ever since have remained among my very favourite players. The first of those ads was for Johnny Smith.

It was a '66 Gibson ad that described Smith's work as "sophisticated jazz". I found out that the Gibson signature archtop in the ad was actually a second attempt to update the acoustic D'Angelico with floating pickup he'd always used, following an earlier Guild Johnny Smith model. But it was his music that got me, a luscious chord-based sound, one I'd never quite come across before, at times seeming almost to levitate above the accompaniment. If you've never heard Johnny and you still think in terms of actual records, try to get hold of his 1956 album *Moonlight In Vermont*. I can't promise, but I suspect you won't say you hate jazz after you've heard that one.

The second piece of 60s promo I stumbled on was for Charlie Byrd. It was a '64 Guild ad, proclaiming that he used one of the firm's Mark VI classical models. Again, I found out that the truth was more complicated, that Mr Byrd seemingly played anything with nylon strings that came his way, from Ramirez to Kohno, from Martin to Takamine. But once more, aside from all of that, it was the music that got to me. Charlie helped popularise the airy swing of bossa nova in the early 60s, and his way with a stated or improvised melody is a joy to behold.

Again, let me direct you to the record I discovered as a result of digging further: it's a compilation called *Latin Byrd*, and along with the Johnny Smith album it's one I've been playing and enjoying on and off for more than 20 years.

The next time you see an endorsement ad for a guitarist you've never heard of or never heard, give it a chance: it could be the start of a long road. To be honest, when I see ads with so-and-so endorsing a guitar, amp or pedal, they tend to bring out the cynic in me. But I try to be constructive and say, 'Well, whatever the artist really plays, he's at least getting some publicity'. And any publicity is good publicity, especially when you're starting out... whether that's in la-la land, the real world, or some sort of mix of the two.

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Vintage TIME MACHINES

SELMER TRUVOICE LITTLE GIANT

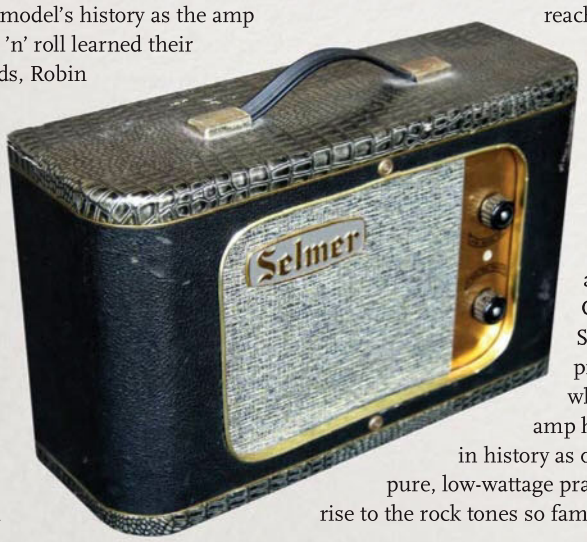
This pocket-sized four-watt classic in crocodile skin delivers a range of predatory rock tones. Snap it up before it's gone...

True to its name, the Selmer Truvoice Little Giant commands far more attention than its size might suggest. Put it in any room full of amps, and many players will walk past the Marshall stacks and Vox AC30s and approach this diminutive 1x6 combo to take in its charm with a smile. Hand them a cable and a guitar, and the smile will only widen.

Selmer produced four versions of the Little Giant, each of them colourful examples from an era when amps were more than black boxes, but this crocodile skin look was the most striking. Unlike the 'blood and custard' or blue-grey schemes, the animal-effect tolex and gold accents on this specimen have a rock aesthetic befitting this model's history as the amp on which icons of rock 'n' roll learned their first riffs. Keith Richards, Robin Trower and Rory Gallagher have all reminisced fondly about their Little Giant experiences as young players.

With a mere four watts pushing through a six-inch made-in-England ELAC speaker, the Little Giant has even less headroom than its American peer, the Fender Champ. Which is no bad thing. From the initial click when you switch it on, any turn of the volume knob to the right results in a different flavour of dirt. The tone knob offers some shaping of the break-up, but for the most part, these Little Giants have one eternally cool, endlessly satisfying trick: nailing prototypical rock tones at non-offensive volumes.

This 1963 specimen (serial no 11416) on sale at Guncotton Guitars in London is in great all-original condition, with just enough wear to remind you of its provenance. In recent years, the Little Giant has become a more sought-after model, with players finally recognising its influence on rock royalty and its perfect, portable crunch. Prices in the US have reached a range of $1,000-$1,400 (£800-£1,120) – genuine collector's-grade money.



For now, enthusiasts on the UK side of the pond can enjoy a geographical advantage. Few Little Giants made it to the States, which has driven prices up. Regardless of who gets hold of one, this amp has cemented its place in history as one of the original, pure, low-wattage practice amps that gave rise to the rock tones so familiar to us all.

VITAL STATISTICS

1963 Selmer Truvoice Little Giant

- **PRICE** £600
- **YEAR** 1963
- **TYPE** Valve amplifier
- **BUILD** 4W 1x6 combo
- **SELLER** Guncotton Guitars (reverb.com/shop/guncotton-guitars)
- **SEE MORE** reverb.com/uk

VOLUME
TONE
TONE

Vintage BENCH TEST

1964 FENDER STRATOCASTER

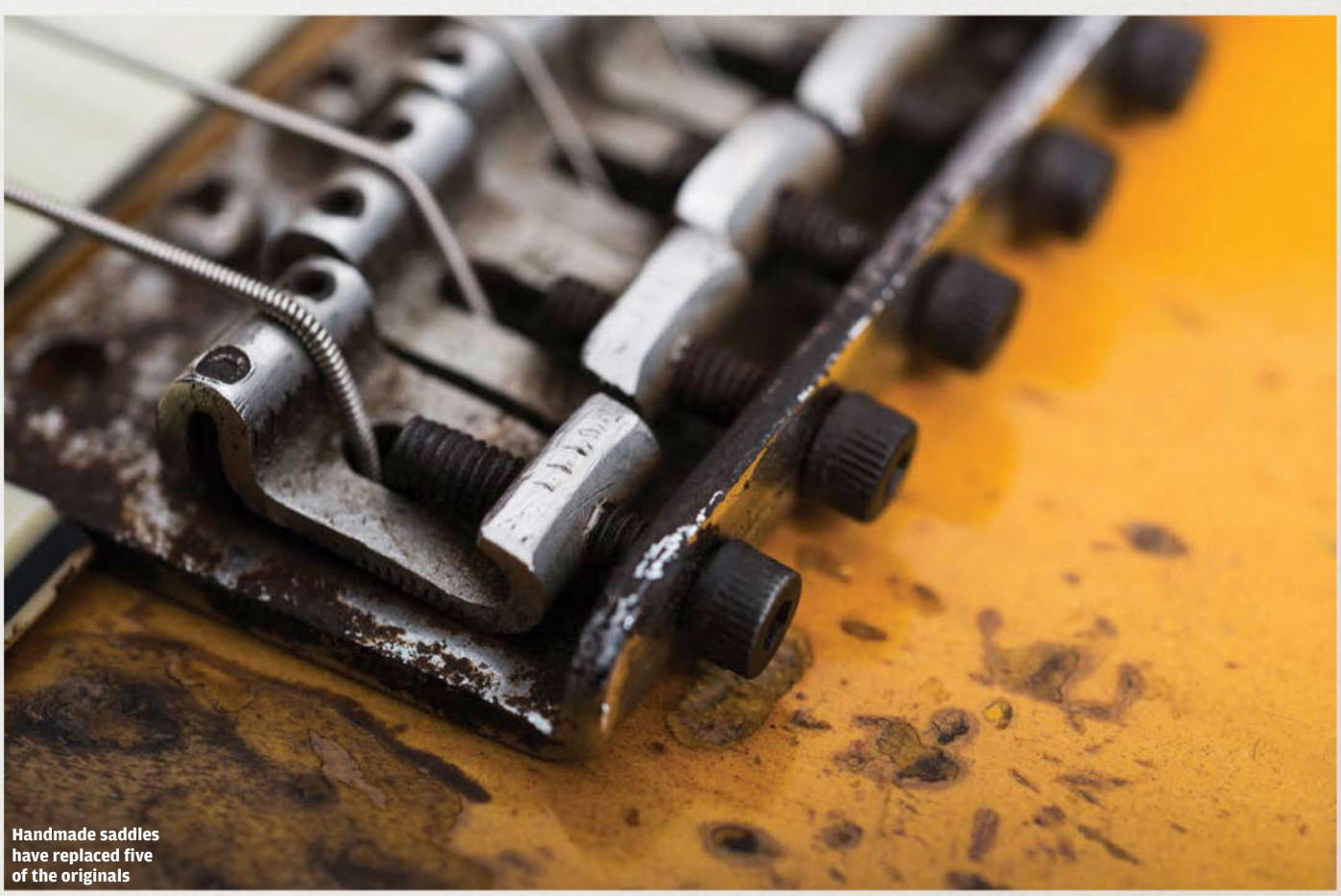
If a played to death pre-CBS Strat is your fantasy guitar, this example from 1964 may be much as you have imagined it. **HUW PRICE** plays the dream

By 1964, the Stratocaster was already a decade old and the design had undergone some significant changes since its inception shortly before the dawn of rock 'n' roll. This sunburst example was clearly played long and hard, yet somebody loved and respected the thing.

The neck is probably the fattest I've ever encountered on a rosewood-board Strat. The width is pretty standard, but it bears little resemblance to the usual 'skinny at the bottom, fatter up top' profile seen commonly on early-60s examples or the more modern-feeling C typical of the mid-60s. On this guitar, the neck starts out substantial and ends up as a full and deep C just before the body joint. In fact, it's borderline clubby. Despite its worn appearance, this guitar is extremely clean and has never been subjected to tuner swaps or other dubious modifications. An extra string tree was added but subsequently removed, and the only non-factory parts are five of the saddles. The highly corroded condition of the one remaining original suggests this was a repair born of necessity.

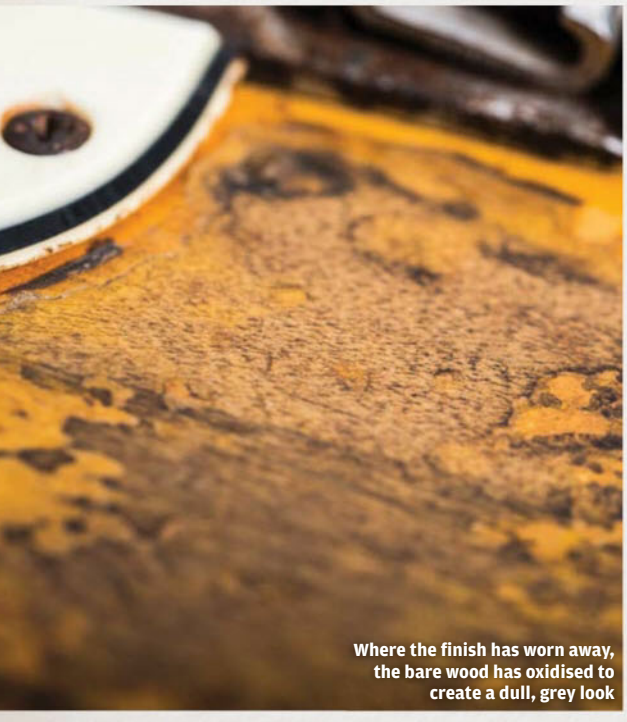
The neck is probably the fattest I've ever encountered on a rosewood-board Strat

The replacement saddles are handmade and somebody made a pretty decent job of it. The machine screws have replaced the intonation adjustment screws, and the sheer effort involved suggests it was done long ago, before replacement >



Handmade saddles have replaced five of the originals

This sunburst finish from 1964 would have had vibrant yellow and red layers, but both have mellowed with age



Where the finish has worn away, the bare wood has oxidised to create a dull, grey look

A severe case of buckle rash has removed much of the finish, but the yellow wood stain can still be seen

KEY FEATURES

1964 Fender Stratocaster

- **PRICE** N/A
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid alder body, bolt-on maple neck with Brazilian rosewood veneer fingerboard, clay dots and 21 jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Single-line Kluson tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3 original pickups, replaced volume pot, original tone controls and three-way pickup selector switch
- **FINISH** 3-tone sunburst body, mostly original neck finish with some overspray, pre-CBS decal
- **SCALE LENGTH** 650mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.5mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.38kg/7.45lbs
- **CONTACT** Vintage Guitar Boutique 0207 729 9186 **www.vintageguitarboutique.com**

saddles were widely available. One of the bridge plate screws is missing, but the rest of the vibrato assembly looks bone stock. As is typical with vintage Strats that haven't been played in anger for some time, the controls and switch have stiffened up. Everything works, but you don't need to worry about knocking the selector switch out of position, because it needs some persuasion to shift it. Someone decided to have the playing area at the back of the neck blown over; the job was done professionally, but it's the only thing that detracts from the look and feel of this superb example of a vintage Strat.

Besides a small area where the rear of the headstock transitions to the neck, everything black lights as one would hope – including the back of the neck. It seems the fresh lacquer was blown over what remained of the original finish. If this were my guitar, I'd have no hesitation in gently rubbing off the overspray using micromesh to restore the appearance and enhance the vintage feel.

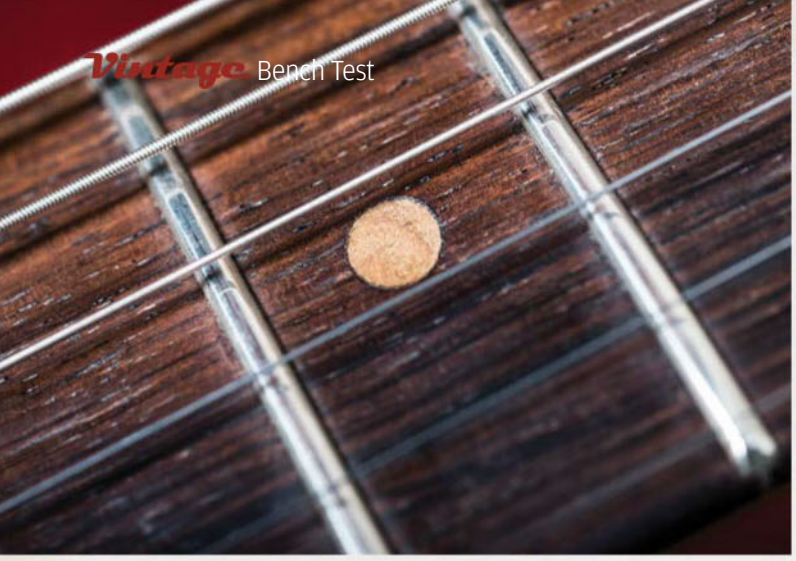
It has a loud, bright, full and unusually muscular unplugged tone with ample sustain

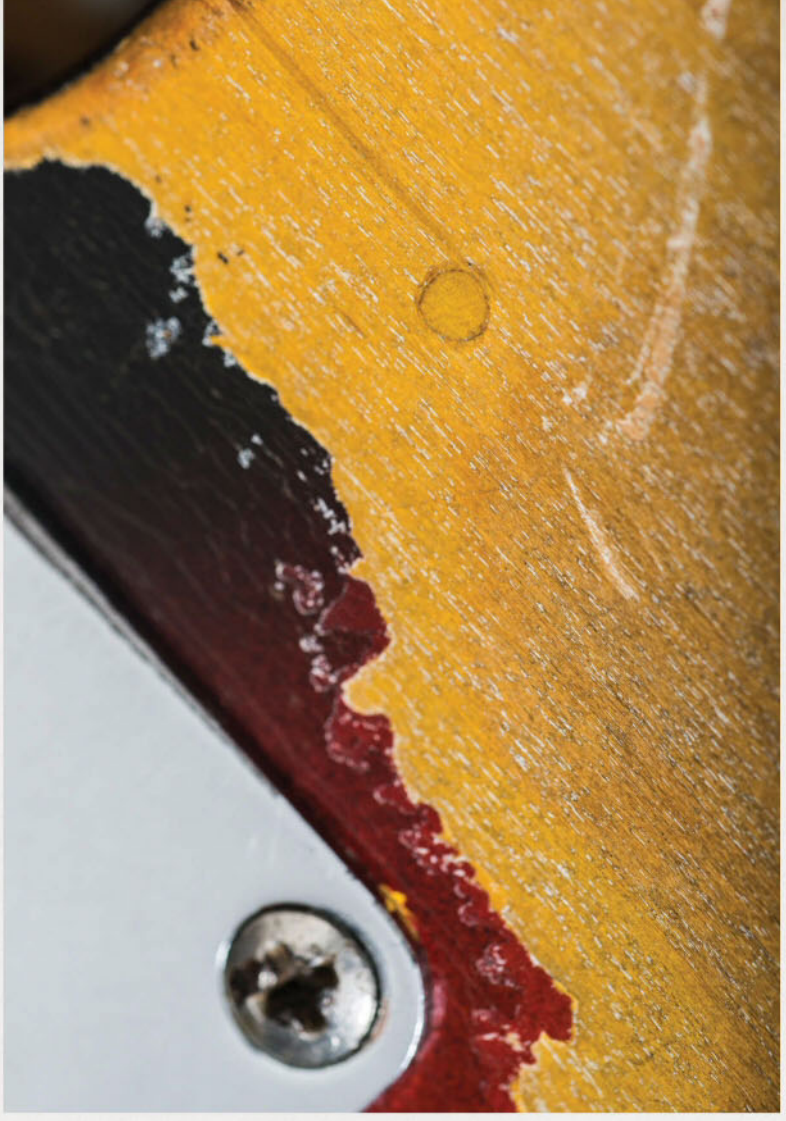
If this guitar was in 'good' condition cosmetically, I probably wouldn't like it half as much as I do. The centre section of the sunburst finish would have been translucent yellow when new, but the clear lacquer top coats have aged to a rich orangey amber. The red band remains well defined without looking too much like a boiled sweet and the edges are a deep dark brown rather than black. On the back, where much of the original finish has worn away to bare wood, the yellow stain can still be seen and the yellow lacquer is more vibrant. There is lacquer checking all over the body, but it has formed in tight lines that pretty >

A rusty plate screw always seems to accompany heavy heel wear

They may look as if they have seen better days, but the original single-line Kluson tuners work just fine

Like so many vintage Fenders, this Strat once had an extra string tree to sharpen the string break angle over the nut





much follow the grain, and the checking is by no means obvious unless you catch the right angle relative to a light source. The plastic parts are all original, and besides the oft-seen crack above the neck pickup screw, the pickguard is in fine shape. It has shrunk and warped in all the correct places, but not excessively so, and the aluminium shielding plate can be seen underneath.

A neck date stamp of 'Jan 64' more or less ties in with the yellow 'April 64' date stamp on the black underside of the pickups, and an 'OK' stamp can be found in the neck pocket along with the paint stick shadow.

In use

When tapped, the neck and body produce B notes an octave apart, and when playing you can feel the vibrations through the body. It has a loud, full, bright and unusually muscular unplugged tone with ample sustain.

Thanks in part to a refret with jumbo wire, I can't help wondering if this is what SRV's favourite Strat may have looked and felt like when he found it hanging in Ray Hennig's Heart Of Texas Music store in the mid-70s. This is a million miles away from the lithe and sculpted maple-neck Strats of the late 50s, and it's the sort of guitar that needs to be shown who's boss.

This is a million miles away from the lithe and sculpted maple-neck Strats of the late 50s

Whoever did the refret had the good judgement to leave the fingerboard well alone. Since it's a veneer board, there's not much wood to play with anyway, and although the playwear is extensive and plain to see, it doesn't compromise playability one bit. However, the action is set pretty high and a basic >

Above **Relic'ers take note – this is what genuine arm wear looks like on the upper bout**
Opposite page, top left **Although the neck has been refretted, the board wasn't level sanded and the clay dots are in fine shape**
Above left **The near invisibility of the side dots is one of the downsides of playing vintage Fenders on dark stages**
Top right **The dark edge of the sunburst once concealed this router jig hole**
Bottom **The thin line and curved layer of rosewood at the end of the neck reveal that this is a veneer rather than a slab board**

Above **The replaced saddles have machine screws for intonation adjustment, but no springs**
Opposite page, top **Judging by the condition of the one remaining saddle, it's unsurprising that the others needed replacing**
Opposite page, bottom **The slight bulge in the pickguard to the right of the screw, and the gap to the left of it, shows how the celluloid shrank as it aged**

setup followed by a period of regular playing would be needed to loosen this Strat up and get it back to its best.

That wouldn't be a hardship, because the tone is pretty special. It's almost as if the frequency response has been tweaked to extend both higher and lower than a regular Strat. The low strings sound huge through every pickup setting, but there's no boom or muddiness. Instead, you get a remarkably solid punch with taut definition and twang.

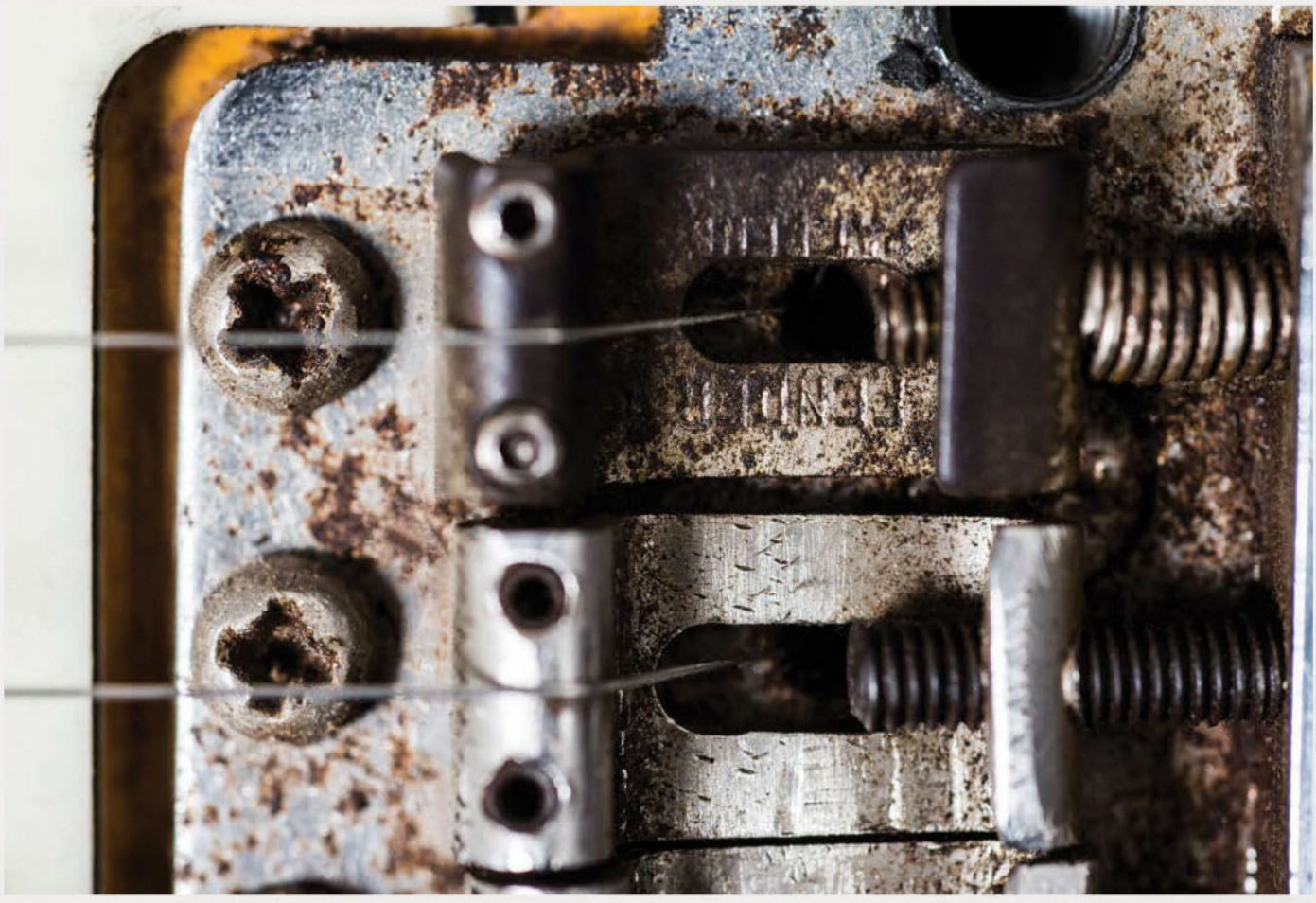
The wide-open treble lends glassy clarity without shrillness. String-to-string definition really impresses, with individual notes clearly ringing through chords. Played clean, the SRV and Frusciante comparisons are unavoidable, and I really couldn't resist breaking out the old TS-9 and Big Muff.

This Strat morphs from poppy, funky and percussive cleans to a full-throated and velvety roar with added gain. Through the TS-9, it does an odd thing whereby the sound gets brighter and sweeter when you turn down the volume. Then, when you turn up, the overdrive thickens and darkens into meaty and effortless sustain.

This Strat morphs from poppy, funky and percussive cleans to a full-throated and velvety roar

It's maybe not for fans of delicate and refined Strats, but if you like to dig in hard when soloing and attack the strings with gusto when playing rhythm, this Strat will not shy away. In fact, I found myself instinctively playing harder than normal – more like I'd approach an acoustic.

Perhaps you're wondering if the tonal character comes from the high action, high-output pickups or a combination of both. The truth is none of the above because I lowered the action before sending it back and the pickups all read around 6k. Every so often, you find a Strat that has more grunt and power than usual, and this just happens to be one of them.



Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

WELSH CONNECTION

Having rocked major UK festivals including Download 2016 with Buck & Evans, guitarist Chris Buck has amassed an enviable collection. **LARS MULLEN** investigates...

Photography **Lars Mullen**

At just 25, Chris Buck has already achieved more than many more experienced players and guitar collectors manage in their whole lives, before cooling down their valves and spending their pensions on guitars they yearned for in their youth. We catch up with Chris at Rockfield Studios as he lays down tracks for his band Buck & Evans' new album. In his own words, Chris is a self-confessed tone-head and loves a guitar solo as much as the next guy, but insists the song must come first.

"I've always wanted our songs to have as much character and soul as possible," says Chris. "While Buck & Evans has its own style of rock and soul, with three-part harmonies, the guitar does play a leading role, but I strive to make sure the blend is sweet – especially with Sally Ann Evans' lead vocal, which has elements of Ann Wilson and Janis Joplin. I have a lot of guitars pooled here for the individual input they offer – acoustics, semis, humbuckers and single coils, they all play a part.

"For live work, though, it's single coils all the way at the moment. I grew up listening to so many Strat players, including Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan, although it was the delicate side of their playing that appealed to me, like Stevie Ray's *Lenny*, for example."

"Acoustic, semis, humbuckers and single coils all play a part... live, it's single coils all the way"

Chris's strumming-hand style involves a rotation of thumb, middle finger and plectrum. "It's a technique I've spent years working with to put my own stamp on. It works so well with the bell-like Fender tones, especially the 2nd and 4th pickup positions, which I adore. I hardly move from the fourth position these days, which works so well in Buck & Evans." >

Opposite page **Chris Buck with his Fender Highway One Strat**
Above left (l-r) **Fender '52 reissue Tele, MJT Blackguard replica**
Top right **1991 Squier Strat, 1991 USA Standard**

Top left **Tempest double-cutaway**
Top right **eBay S-type (left), 1989 Eric Clapton Signature**
Bottom right **PRS McCarty Hollowbody II (left), Fender Flame Elite**

Chris's 2004 Highway One Strat has been his main guitar for live and studio work for a while now and is loaded with a set of his own Radio Shop ID signature pickups. ID denotes the company's Increased Dynamics Series, where the inner coil is left unwaxed. "This offers improved sensitivity and dynamics for electric players who use the picking technique, while they also rock out at high gain levels. I'm really pleased with them."

Chris has four other Strats at the moment, which include a Squier and a USA Standard, both dating from '91. "That's actually the year I was born. I eventually bought the Squier off my dad. It was my first introduction to an electric guitar, in my very early teens. He was precious about it, so he bought me a Squier Affinity Telecaster which I still have, with a promise that if I stuck at it, he'd buy me a butterscotch reissue for my 21st birthday.

"Three years later, I get a call from Slash, saying get along to his gig at the NIA and bring my guitar"

At £400, Chris's '89 Eric Clapton Signature was a "real deal", which he bought from World Of Guitars in Cheltenham. "It was marked down because the last owner had replaced the Pewter Grey body with a Sea Foam Green version. I'm happy now after finding the correct body with the routing for the electronics on eBay. You could call my natural S-type an eBay guitar, as it's made up from parts that I bought over the internet and assembled with very little knowledge, including the wiring. I have to say my dad was a great help with this, although we were both working with spit and will power. I still can't work out how or why it plays and sounds so good."

Chris was around 16 when he started uploading videos of himself to YouTube with this guitar, playing an assortment of tracks from the likes of David Bowie, AC/DC, Deep Purple and Guns N'

Roses. "It was just as an outlet for my playing, really. I was a huge Guns N' Roses fan, which seemed to set off a million triggers, and I had a call from Alan Niven who was the band's manager up to '91. He gave me a lot of encouragement. I was in awe of anything Slash played, and learned all his licks and even bought this 2001 Les Paul Standard for full effect. I kept in touch with Alan and little did I know, he was drip-feeding my videos to Slash. About three years later, I get a call from Slash, saying get along to his gig at the NIA in Birmingham and bring my guitar. I thought... Is this really Slash, or one of my mates taking the piss?

"I'm so glad there's YouTube footage of myself jamming with my hero, as it was a bit like somebody describing a car crash or something when all you can remember is before and after the event. But I do remember looking him straight in the eye and thinking, 'I'm really here, don't blow it, keep cool'. I was 21, but just 14 inside my head that night. I also flew out to Prescott, Arizona with Sally Ann in 2013, where we played as Slash's backing band at a benefit concert. But you know, I didn't play the Les Paul, I used the natural eBay-parts S-type which, in a way, was a pivotal turning point for me. I think a lot of people – especially Alan Niven, who is our manager now – were pleased about the fact that I was now finding my own mark within my playing style and direction. I'm happy with my live sound right now, too – I'm using a Blackstar Artist 30."

There are several humbucker-loaded guitars in the studio, including a lesser-spotted Fender Flame. "This is a versatile guitar, especially with its coil-tap facilities. I actually didn't know a lot about this guitar when I bought it, but having now done all the research, I can see the connection with Robben Ford. It's a gorgeous guitar, but not one I'm in a hurry to gig with.

"Like so many I have here, it's great to have around when Buck & Evans are recording. The same applies to my PRS McCarty Hollowbody II, which is not one of my road guitars but covers a lot of ground, having coil-tap and blend facilities with the piezo system. This guitar has completed the sonic equation I've had in my head on several occasions – very versatile and a great player.

"I bought it in Strung Out Guitars in Glasgow. I have to say it was the aesthetics that did it for >

Above left **Fender Flame Elite headstock**
Above right **Gretsch Country Gentleman (left), Epiphone Casino**

Gibson
SG
Gibson
Blackst

me at first, it looked so cool. Maybe it's because I'm a total Strat-head, and a lot of the time, a Strat can look like a Strat."

Chris also has a soft spot for larger guitars, and we spot an aged, gig-scuffed case that's home to a classic thinline semi. "I've used my '66 Gibson ES-335 live in the band, but I was so nervous about its value each time, I didn't let it out of my sight. The body has developed lacquer crazing, as it's over half a century old, but I'm okay with that. I'd be terrified if I was the one to put a ding on a pristine model from this era.

"I also grew up watching endless loops of Cream's *Farewell Concert* from 1968, Clapton's playing on that 335 is just awesome – humbuckers sound so individual on this model.

"I have a slight yearning for big-bodied semis; I also have a Gretsch Country Gent and this Epiphone Casino. I don't understand how they can make a guitar as good as this Casino for the money. I was totally inspired after seeing John Lennon looking so cool with one on the Apple Building rooftop film in 1969. This was the first guitar I had with P-90s, a pickup I feel is so underrated."

Chris is using a new, P-90-loaded Yamaha Revstar for rhythm guitar on a few tracks, including one called *Sinking* on the new Buck & Evans album, which is untitled at the moment, but set for release this year. "It's a well-built, heavy guitar, which I have a fondness for. My Yamaha SG1000, which I believe is late 70s, certainly outweighs my Les Paul and I would guess weighs the same as my car, but the trade-off is the amazing sustain.

"I often think the last note I played on it is still ringing when it's back in the case. Like I've said, a lot are here for a purpose.

"If I want to lay down some big full-on jangly chords, I won't use the SG1000, I'll naturally reach for my Rickenbacker 330, which I used on a track called *Slow Train* that was released last year.

"Some players find Rickenbacker necks a little narrow, but I think part and parcel of being a >

Opposite **2001 Gibson SG Standard (left), 2001 Les Paul Standard**
Top left **Rickenbacker 330 (left), Charvel Model 4**
Top right **Yamaha Revstar (left), Yamaha SG1000**
Above **Chris playing his Alvarez OM70**

Above **1966 Gibson ES-335**

player is to be able to adapt to a guitar's neck profile or scale length and get the best out of it, a bit like a Formula 1 driver who can hop in a Nissan Micra and drive it to extremes.

"The Tempest double-cutaway is a little out of character in my collection. I don't know that much about it, I'd like to know more, if anyone has any information. It's typical late 70s/early 80s with a five-piece through-neck and is a bit of a rocker."

Chris describes his Charvel Model 4, from the late 80s, as probably the most alien in his collection; the odd one out with a pointy headstock and 'angry' hardware.

"Several times I've given it a clean and fitted new strings ready to move it on, but when I give it the final play to make sure all is well, I put it back in the case. I can't part with it.

"Part and parcel of being a player is to be able to adapt to a profile or scale length and get the best out of it"

"I write a lot with an electric guitar, but there's something about listening to open chords and solo runs on a really good acoustic like my Alvarez OM70 from the company's Elite Masterworks series, featuring East Indian rosewood for the body and an AA-grade slice of sitka spruce for the top. I sometimes feel I'm not worthy of a guitar with such fine appointments – there are certainly no belt buckles when I sit down with this one!"

As we come to the end of our time going through Chris's arsenal of impressive instruments, though, it's notable that throughout the interview, he's hardly let go of his Highway One Strat. "I'll probably continue to pick up every Strat I come across just to see how it sounds, along with guitars loaded with P-90s and humbuckers," laughs Chris. *For more information on Chris Buck and Buck & Evans, visit www.buckandevans.com.*

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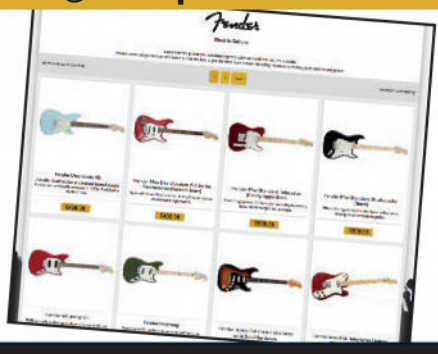

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All about... Gold Foil pickups

Guitarists searching for an alternative sound to the classic pickup triumvirate of single coils, humbuckers and P-90s have turned to Gold Foils for a fresh tonality. **HUW PRICE** outlines their history and some essential buying information

Pretty much every classic guitar pickup we can think of achieved legendary status in association with the guitars they were installed in. Consider PAFs, Filter'Trons, P-90s or DeArmond Dynasonics and you can probably name a bunch of classic guitar models that are inextricably linked with those pickups. In that sense, the Gold Foil is an aberration, because they were generally consigned to bargain-basement American guitars and the junk guitars the Japanese produced before they got really good at it. Subsequently, Gold Foil pickups remained under the radar for all those not obsessed with obscure blues artists and arcane 60s punk bands.

When it comes to thinking outside the (guitar) box, few can surpass David Lindley. As an extraordinary multi-instrumentalist as well as a guitarist, Lindley has played with just about everybody who is anybody and has been a lifelong collector of unusual instruments. He's also closely associated with his friend Ry Cooder.

By Cooder's account, the sound of his Daphne Blue Stratocaster had bothered him for years and he eventually embarked on a quest to sort out his electric tone. His first step seemed logical, because Cooder liked the sound of lap steels, but he didn't like playing lap-style.

So he removed the pickup from a Valco lap steel and had it

installed in the bridge position of a reissue Sunburst Buddy Holly Strat body. Cooder liked what he heard, but he needed a neck pickup to broaden his guitar's tonal range and complement the lap-steel pickup. This is where Lindley stepped in to recommend that Cooder should try a Teisco Gold Foil. Since Howlin' Wolf had played a guitar with Gold Foils, Cooder didn't need much persuading. He had one installed a tad further away from the neck than is usual for a neck pickup to tighten the sound a little, and the resulting guitar has become known as 'The Coodercaster'.

Since Howlin' Wolf played a guitar with Gold Foils, Ry Cooder didn't need much persuading

Cooder described the Gold Foil sound as "an enormous bubble of resonance" and countless Cooder fans have since attempted to build their own version of his guitar. The Coodercaster was up and running by the late 80s, but the enthusiasm for Gold Foils has only become widespread and mainstream in the last decade, thanks to the likes of Dan Auerbach. Let's take a closer look at what makes Gold Foils look and sound so distinctive.

East meets west

This is where things get complicated, because not all Gold Foils were created equal – or indeed in the same factory, or even continent. American Gold Foils were made by Rowe Industries (aka DeArmond) in Toledo, Ohio, while the Japanese ones were made by Teisco.

Every type has a metal cover with a variety of shapes stamped out to reveal a gold-coloured layer of metal foil positioned under the cover. However, not all 'Gold Foil' pickups have gold foil and you can find examples with black foil. The shapes of these cut-outs on the metal covers have inspired nicknames including the DeArmond 'Moustache', 'S-Grille' and 'Diamond-Grille' types, which were fitted to so many Silvertone and Harmony guitars during the late 50s and throughout the 60s. Specialist pickup maker Curtis Novak regards these as the best-sounding of all the Gold Foils and winds his own DeArmond replicas.

Here in the UK, Marc at Mojo Pickups makes a wide variety of Teisco-style Gold Foil pickups and is consequently something of an authority on the subject. He kindly filled us in on some of the technical aspects that distinguish Gold Foils from other pickups, and how the American and Japanese versions differ.

Marc believes that Teisco was possibly copying DeArmond because it wanted eye-catching pickups that would distract customers from the poor quality of its guitars. There were certainly some similarities between the two types.

Although S-Grille and Diamond-Grille DeArmond >

magnets varied, the majority were ceramic. However, the Moustache DeArmond and all of the Teiscos had rubberised ceramic magnets. These magnets are cheap to manufacture and are commonly used for cupboard-door catches and bendy fridge magnets.

DeArmond magnets were also slightly longer and wider. Both manufacturers wound coils that were just about 1/8-inch high. The vast majority of industry-standard pickups have taller coils wound with thicker wire.

In contrast, Teisco used 44 AWG wire and DeArmond used 45 AWG, which is so delicate it can be very tricky to wind. It's also the reason why you can't presume they will produce a hot output level, despite the apparently high DC resistance. The coils were wound quite loosely and since neither manufacturer wax potted its coils, vintage Gold Foils are notorious for microphonic squeal at even moderate volume levels.

Although opinions differ on which Gold Foils sound best, the Cooder connection means that the Teisco versions are most sought after – in particular, the ones with the tiny adjustable polepiece screws positioned along one side. However, if you pop off the cover, you'll see the screws are nowhere near the coil or the magnet. According to Marc, they provide a tiny bit of inductance, but their role is primarily decorative and you needn't bother trying to adjust them.

Golden sound

Guitarists don't tend to have as much experience of Gold Foils as other pickup types. For this writer, the adjectives that spring to mind are 'brightness' and 'clarity'. However, the extended treble is devoid of shrillness and the tonal character has a comparatively flat response and an almost 'hi-fi' quality. Basically, it's like having little microphones strapped to the top of your guitar, and they're remarkably sensitive to playing touch.

Played clean, they're capable of really pretty tone – almost like a jazz pickup with added wiry spank. They also have a woodiness that enhances and balances the brightness. With overdrive, they can growl nicely, but the top end always cuts through and can develop into quite startling harmonic complexity. Primarily, they seem to appeal to players who are into roots tone but are looking for something a little different to provide inspiration.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Want Gold Foils? Start with these...

Given their current levels of popularity, it may be surprising to learn that you can still pick up vintage Gold Foils cheaply. Even Cooder-style Teisco ones are readily available on Reverb.com for around £100 or even less. However, it's worth remembering that, as ever, buying cheap may involve a compromise on quality somewhere down the line: Marc from Mojo Pickups warns that finding a really good-sounding vintage Teisco pickup involves some degree of luck.

Fortunately, vintage isn't the only option. As their reputation grew over the years, demand for Gold Foils naturally increased and they're now commonplace on modern boutique and handmade guitars. They're also popular on Jazzmaster- and La Cabronita-style builds, and as a Telecaster neck option. Several pickup winders now include Gold Foils in their catalogues and, in addition to vintage-correct repros, there are Gold Foil varieties that will fit Strats, Teles and even PAF-sized rings.

MOJO PICKUPS TEISCO GOLD FOIL £90

Handmade here in the UK to vintage 60s Teisco spec, this is the Ry Cooder model with a 44 AWG wire coil and rubberised ceramic magnet. The neck and bridge are wound to 6.1k and 7k, with a relic version for an extra £5. This pickup is also available as a drop-in replacement for P-90, Firebird, PAF and Jazzmaster pickups.

CURTIS NOVAK ROWE/DEARMOND-STYLE REPROS $155

Novak's Gold Foils are reproductions of the USA-manufactured pickups and come in three flavoured toppings – moustache, S-Grille and Diamond Grille. You can also choose different-coloured foils and specify your preferred DC resistance within the range 5k to 13k.

LOLLAR GOLD FOIL $190

Jason Lollar's Teisco-style Gold Foil pickups are made with authentic rubberised ferrite magnets, 44 AWG wire and a 1/8-inch-tall bobbin. Since proximity to the strings is critical to bringing out the best from these pickups, Lollar also sells shims for these pickups, in various thicknesses.

VICTORY LOWRIDER VINTAGE GOLD FOIL £46

Although not modelled on any vintage Gold Foil, the Lowrider is a compact version. Smaller in every dimension, the Lowrider is only 5/16-inches tall and is designed for top-mounting on guitar bodies, with minimal modification. This could be a good choice for fiiting to resonators and cigar-box guitars.

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Chord Clinic

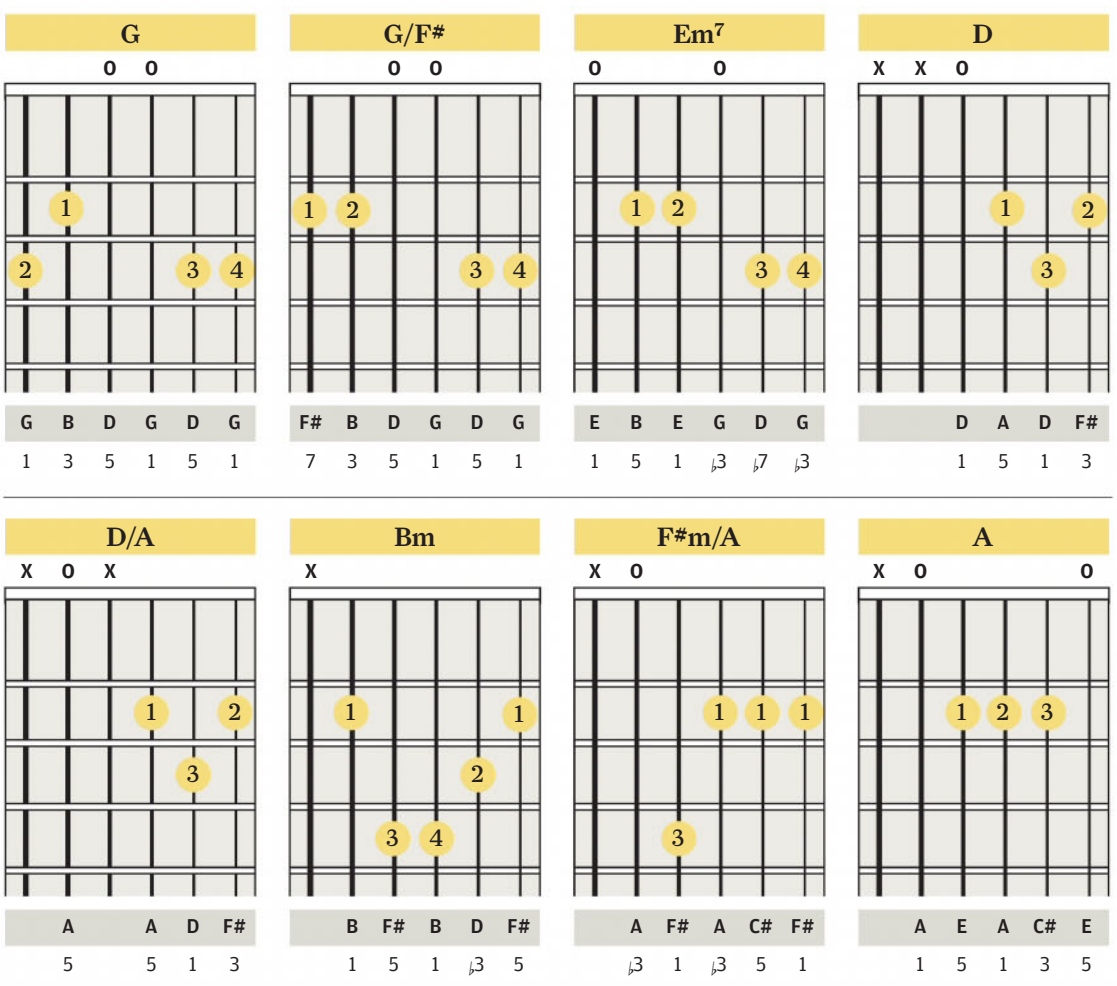
Starting out with a straightforward eight-bar sequence, find out where chord substitution can take you. **ROD FOGG** swaps things around...

Over the last couple of months, we have looked at some compositional ideas which enable us to take a simple chord sequence and develop it, adding interest using suspensions, pedal notes and slash chords. In this edition of Chord Clinic, we are going to look at the technique of chord substitution.

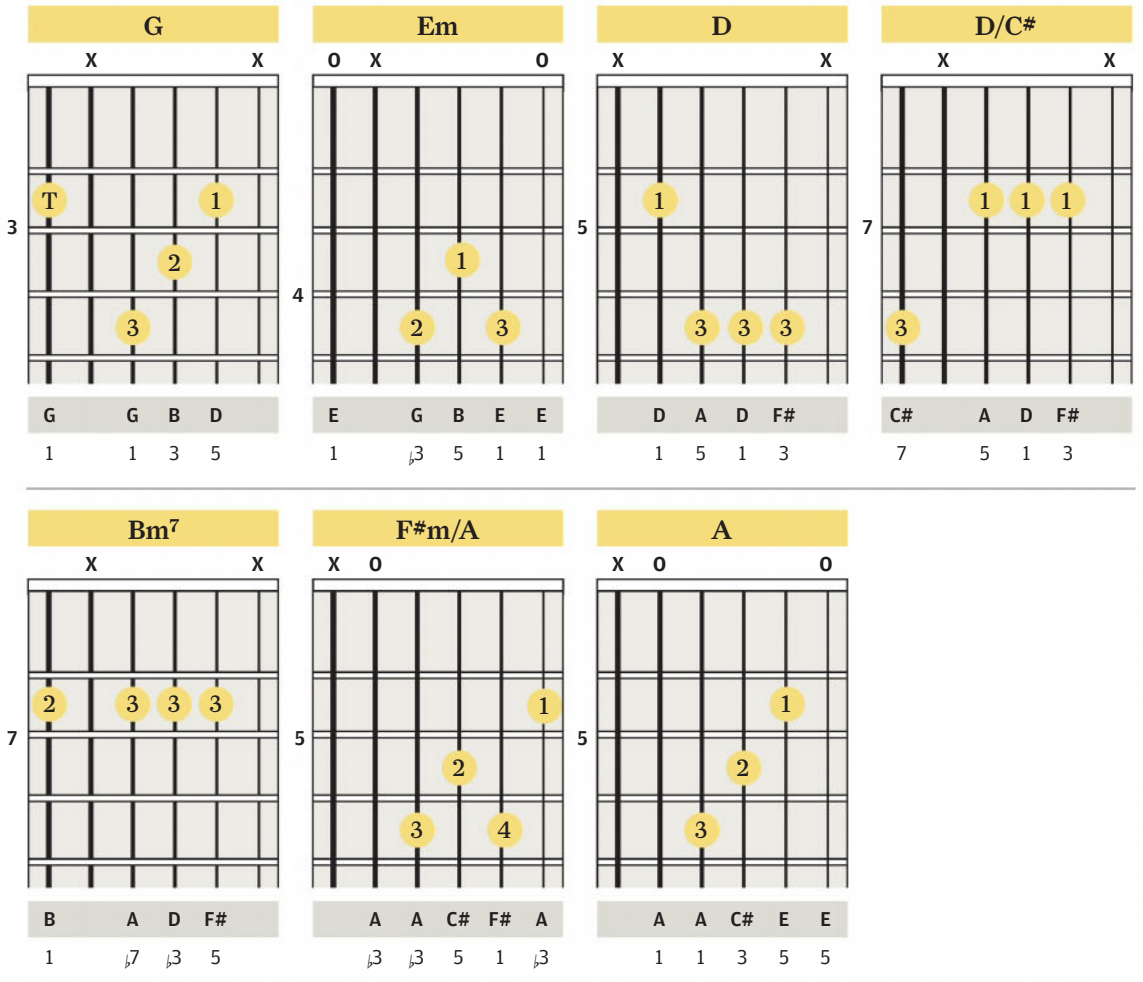
This technique relies on the idea that you can replace a chord with another chord, provided they have a reasonable number of notes in common. G major, for example, consists of the notes G, B and D; B minor consists of the notes B, D and F sharp, and E minor consists of E, G and B. Both these minor chords contain two notes that can be found in G major, so they might work well in its place. As in the last few Chord Clinics, we're using a simple eight-bar bridge-style chord sequence of two bars each of G, D, G and A.

Take a look at figure 1, and play the basic chord sequence above using the G, D and A chord diagrams. That will give you the sound of the chord sequence that we are trying to develop. Then go back to the top, and this time play G and G/F# in the first bar (two beats each), and substitute the second bar of G with E minor seven. Then, instead of playing two bars of D, play D and D/A in the first bar and use the substitute chord B minor in the second bar. For the last four bars, play the G and E minor chords as above before landing on a bar each of F#m/A and A

Substitute for another chord (Fig 1)



Take it higher (Fig 2)



major. The slash chords add movement, but the substitute chords take the sequence in an interesting and surprising direction.

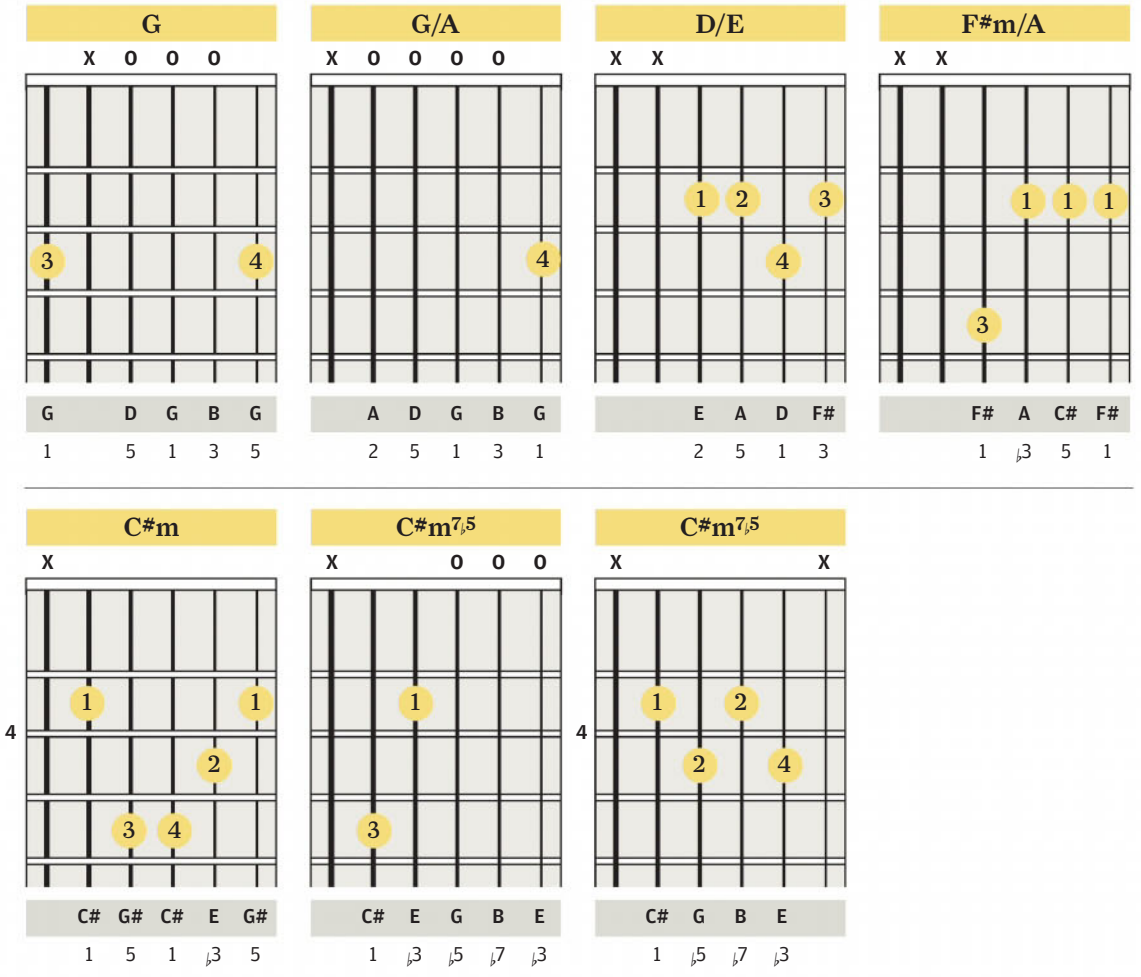
Notice that we had to change the order of the substitution for the last two bars because the sequence sounds more satisfying if we end on A. Try reversing the last two chords and see what you think. One little detail is that it's a good idea to mute the D string when you play the D/A chord, as it lets the bass movement come through more clearly – you can achieve this by leaning your index finger over a little so that it touches the D string. This sequence is meant to be played with a pick, and goes well on electric with a jangly indie-style sound. Just for fun, if you have a capo put it on the second fret and try the sequence again. Did it come out brighter and lighter, and with a bit more character? Bands such as Travis (*Why Does It Always Rain on Me*) and Oasis (*Wonderwall*) found the same thing.

Figure 2 takes a few steps up the guitar to explore the same chord sequence with some higher voicings and different connecting bass notes, such as the D/C# to connect the D major chord to the B minor seven. Starting on G6 allows us to have a chiming open string at the top of the first two chords, which returns at the top of the final A major chord. Not everyone can get their third finger flat to hold down three notes in the D major and B minor seven chords. The marginally more difficult alternative is to use fingers two, three and four.

Figure 3 looks at some possibilities using the 'other' substitution mentioned above; B minor for G major, F sharp minor for D major and, possibly, C sharp minor for A major. This time, we have used a less chunky version of G major and followed it with G/A to connect to B minor. D major can be found in figure 1 and followed by D/E to connect to a four-string version of F# minor. Then it's back to G and B minor and straight to A major. What about C sharp minor? Well, it's included for the sake of completeness, but if you try preceding the A major chord with C#m you will find that it makes a very strange sound, because in this context it is outside of the home key of D major; you can try either of the C#m7♭5 chords instead, but you might decide that F#m works much better.

If you know your major scales, it is not hard to locate minor chords that can substitute for major chords. If you think of the major chord as the first note of the scale, the strongest minor chord substitution is found on the sixth step of the scale; this is known as the relative minor. The other possible minor-chord substitution is found on the third step of the scale. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to find a short major-chord sequence and experiment with minor substitutions of your own.
See you next month.

The possibilities are endless... (Fig 3)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: Building your own attenuator and The Joy Of FX...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Attenuate to accumulate

I thought I would thank you for the article you ran in the June 2016 edition of *Guitar & Bass* in which you described how to build an attenuator. For a few years, I have toyed with the idea of obtaining an attenuator to use with my Laney L20T. While the amp is great, I have never been able to push it properly at home, and was always wondering what I was missing.

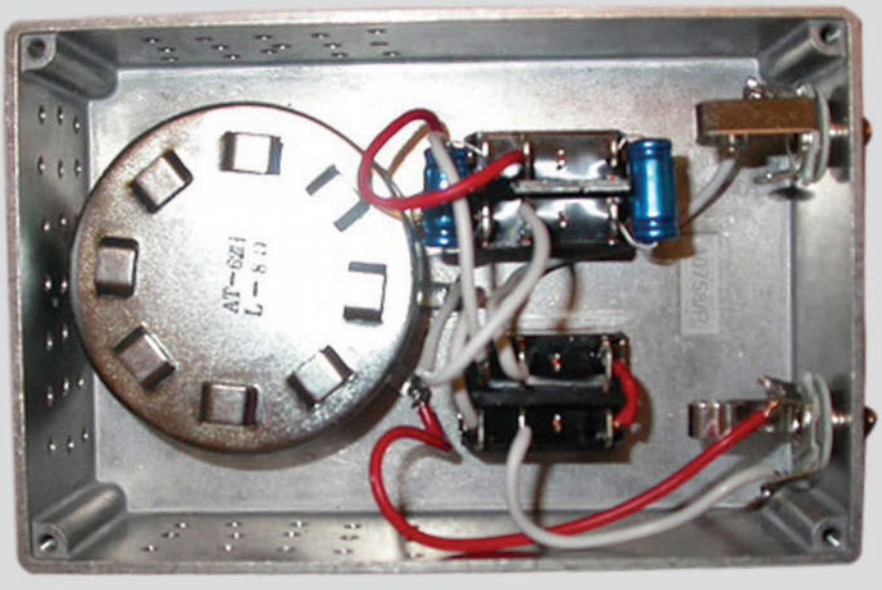
So, when I saw the article describing comprehensively how to build your own, I decided that I would give it a go. However, this required me learning how to solder first, and then putting that skill into practice by first repairing a broken guitar cable, then creating a few speaker cables. And, finally, onto the main project itself and building the attenuator – less the impedance switch. At 61, I have now acquired some new skills and had loads of fun putting the attenuator together.

It also meant that the family were not short of suggestions for this year's Christmas presents! It is great now to be able to push the amp harder and to enjoy the individual qualities of my guitars much better than I was able to when they were mostly restricted to pretty clean tones at modest volumes.

Just one thing... How did Huw manage to drill the holes in the side of his case so evenly? Has he sold his soul to the dark one?

John Hutcheson, Erskine

G&B Thanks for the brilliant letter and congratulations on a successful project, John. As for Huw, he's a very clever man indeed...



WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

Ode to Joy

I just wanted to thank you for your excellent *The Joy Of FX* magazine [*G&B*, January 2017 supplement]. I've recently returned to guitar playing after a break of nearly 20 years – marriage, kids and work got in the way – and have found the explosion in pedals that has taken place in that time somewhat baffling! I was looking for a good clean boost, and took your advice and bought a J Rockett Archer Ikon – as featured in your '20 Best FX Pedals In The World Today'. All I can say is, good call! It's an amazing pedal, and my beloved old Strat and Deluxe Reverb have never sounded better. In this confusing world of countless new pedals, a little guidance is a godsend.

Michael Colford, via email

G&B We're glad you enjoyed The Joy Of FX, Michael. Look out for issue two coming soon!

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us via snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively, get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

The Doors

THE DOORS: 50TH ANNIVERSARY DELUXE ED

Thanks to the success of *that* movie about them (that becomes worse with every passing year) and the enduring cult of Jim Morrison, The Doors have become such a taken-for-granted cultural phenomenon that everyone has already made their mind up about them. This three-CD reissue of their debut deserves to change all that, but it won't, of course. It has their two best singles, closes with arguably their best band performance, and is packed with incredible individual and ensemble moments. Robby Krieger is a chameleonic presence, playing muscular rhythms and authentic blues one minute and path-finding psychedelic solos the next. A rediscovered contemporary live set completes the package, but it's all about the remastered mono and stereo mixes of one of rock's greatest opening statements. **CM**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jefferson Airplane, The Who*

Conor Oberst

SALUTATIONS

A companion piece to last year's acclaimed stripped-back *Ruminations*, Bright Eyes main man Oberst has played a blinder here in enlisting the help of The Felice Brothers as his backing band, along with veteran sessioneer Jim Keltner on drums. An all-star cast of contributors also boasts M Ward, Jim James, Gillian Welch and Blake Mills. All 10 tracks of *Ruminations* are remade with the full band, along with seven new songs. Though Oberst's world-weary lyrics remain for the most part, these new bulked-out arrangements are often deceptively upbeat. Superb new track *Napalm* takes electrified Dylan as the touchstone rather than his folk troubadour years, while *Barbary Coast (Later)* and *A Little Uncanny* remain stand-outs. The rocked-up *Anytime Soon* makes for a nice change of pace, too. **SH**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Ryan Adams, Elliott Smith*

Rodrigo Y Gabriela

RODRIGO Y GABRIELA DELUXE REISSUE

This 10th anniversary(ish) reissue of the Mexican duo's 2006 debut, co-produced with John Leckie, comes with two bonus tracks and a never-before-released live concert DVD from the same year, recorded at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin (the duo had lived in Dublin since 1999; their debut shot to No 1 in the Irish charts). By now, we've all become familiar with their talents, but at the time, the super-tight, mind melding between Rod's fluid melodies and the muscular rhythmic guiding hand of Gab made for a compelling and fresh listen. Although they've advanced their style on each successive album, the reason the covers of Metallica's *Orion* and Zep's *Stairway…* still manage to sidestep any charges of gimmickry is because of the work the duo have evidently put into their craft and their joyful, committed delivery. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Metallica, José González, Richie Havens*

Bob Young

BACK IN QUO COUNTRY

An album of Quo covers in a country style? It's actually not that much of a stretch. Bob Young, co-writer of several of Quo's biggest hits, revisits their back catalogue with Rossi and Parfitt on board as backing vocalists, plus there's the expert help of Albert Lee, and BJ Cole on pedal steel. *Down Down* works as a country rocker, while *Caroline* has a nicely lilting charm. It's an interesting idea, let down by Young's reliance on including only his own Quo co-writes. **SH**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Status Quo!*

Steve Hackett

THE NIGHT SIREN

Studio album 25 from the former Genesis guitarist finds him in ambitious form. It's a globe-spanning record featuring musicians from Israel, Palestine and Peru, alongside Hackett's virtuoso prog guitar. Grandiose opener *Behind The Smoke* boasts an almost *Kashmir*-like sweeping string-laden riff and some tasty guitar pyrotechnics. *Fifty Miles From The North Pole* includes a choir and there's even stunning flamenco guitar on *Anything But Love*. **SH**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Steven Wilson, Steve Howe*

Mark Lanegan Band

GARGOYLE

The former Screaming Trees frontman's latest is a collaboration with English musician Rob Marshall. A menacing Krautrock air pervades, with *Nocturne* a wonderful fog of driven reverby guitars, propellant bass and Lanegan's weathered vocals. Lanegan's former QOTSA bandmate Josh Homme contributes backing vocals to the surprisingly jaunty Kinks-eque *Emperor,* in stark contrast to the sagely wistful slide-guitar decorated *Goodbye To Beauty* and latter-day New Order-esque closer *Old Swan*. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Jesus And Mary Chain, Nick Cave*

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DAN PATLANSKY

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Ahead of his upcoming UK tour, the South African virtuoso talks vintage Strats, tequila and the Klon that got away...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I couldnt live without my '62 Strat. Ive been playing it exclusively for the last 20 years, and it feels like home. The scary thing is I might have to start looking at other options, as she is getting very tired. Bummer."

2 In another life I would be...
"I'd be a very wealthy vintage guitar collector who could buy whatever my heart desired."

3 The moment that started it all...
"It all started when I was about 12. I was listening to *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* by Floyd, and I knew that making music was the only thing I would be interested in doing. I had saved up some money and it was between golf clubs or a Strat. A wise choice."

4 The one that got away...
"I remember years back someone tried to sell me a real Klon [Centaur] for next to no money. I passed on the pedal because at that time I had never heard of a Klon and it was pretty bleak-looking to my ignorant 21-year-old brain."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"About 15 years ago, I was booked to play an outdoor festival and I didn't have my own amp with me. There were four Marshall stacks on stage, so I thought I would run all of them at the same time on 11. I was so loud that I couldn't even hear the band, and I had nothing to reference to. The bleakest of times was had by all!"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"If you truly convince yourself, anything can be done!"

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"For some unknown reason it's always been an A♭13 chord. I can always hear the tuning better with that chord. It's also a pretty-sounding chord for me."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"A single shot of tequila. The one shot makes the world of difference. It stops me over-thinking everything, and when I'm not over-thinking I think the music comes out in a more natural way. The trick is to keep it to one shot, otherwise it heads south for me in a big way."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"Little River Band. Enough said."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"It would be the piano for me. And I don't mean blasting out a chord or two, Im talking about playing like Oscar Peterson. He played a big part in my love for music, and when I hear him play it feels like time stops and music mastery has reached its pinnacle."

Dan Patlansky tours the UK with special guest Ash Wilson in April. See Danpatlansky.com for tickets

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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Welcome TO COUNTRY MUSIC

The popularity of country music has exploded in the last few years. Sure, it's always had its disciples, the die-hards who'll remind you it was Dolly Parton that wrote Whitney Houston's biggest hit; *I Will Always Love You*; and tirelessly recall the year that Johnny Cash outsold The Beatles [1969]. But now, country music has crossed over in the UK like never before. Not only do we have major festivals like the Country2Country event every March, there's a new breed of British artists – The Shires, Dexeter, Ward Thomas and others - making the music their own. Now, there's Country Music magazine, a new publication that gives all forms of country music the respect it deserves with the best in writing, photography and design. The pages you hold in your hands are a free sample of what we do. Take a look. Get hooked… and please accept my invitation to join our growing legion of readers and subscribers.

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Hot shot

WHITNEY ROSE

Hails from **Charlottetown, Canada**
For fans of **Kacey Musgraves, Caitlin Rose**

Sometimes, it takes an outsider to really appreciate a culture, and Canadian-born, Austin-based singer Whitney Rose has fallen head-over-cowboy-boots for the dance-hall scene of the State she calls home. So much so that her new EP, *South Texas Suite*, includes *Three Minute Love Affair*, about the delights of taking a waltz, shuffle or two-step around a honky-tonk floor. "The dance culture in Texas is phenomenal and is one of the two things I fell in love with when I came here," Whitney says. "The other is the food! I could watch people dance here for hours."

Dale Watson is the keeper of the traditional country flame, and Rose recorded her EP in Dale's backyard studio, with such local legends as Redd Volkaert, guitarist in Merle Haggard's band, and Earl Poole Ball, Johnny Cash's long-term pianist. "This is my love letter to Texas," Rose says.

Rose was raised in the Union Hall, a music venue operated by her grandparents in Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island in south-east Canada. Born in the mid 1980s, she may have been named after Whitney Houston ("My mother denies it, but I'm not sure I believe her," she says), Whitney was more drawn to the music her grandparents adored: Hank Williams, George Strait and Keith Whitley. At parties, her grandparents would give Whitney a dollar to sing Hank Williams' *There's A Tear In My Beer* when she was just a toddler. "I don't want to say my music is a throwback," Whitney reflects, "but I definitely draw from my influences, which tend to be from days gone by. Someone once referred to me as a marriage of Patsy Cline and more poppy stuff, like The Ronettes or The Chiffons."

That combination of old-school country and retro pop saw Rose support The Mavericks in Toronto, and then their entire Canadian tour. Before long, Rose was singing a duet on stage with the band's Raul Malo, which led Malo to produce her album, *Heartbreaker Of The Year*. Malo is also producing Rose's new album due out in autumn. "Everything I do with Raul has, not exactly a Mavericks sound, but there's definitely hints of it," says the singer, who tours the UK in May. **KK**

Check out **Whitney Rose** *with all our other new music on our Spotify playlist*
http://sptfy.com/1MNT

HALLOWED GROUND

Iconic locations in country

TOOTSIE'S ORCHID LOUNGE

Separated by a narrow alley from Nashville's Ryman Auditorium, once the iconic Grand Ole Opry, Tootsie's World Famous Orchid Lounge is not your ordinary dive on the city's Broadway. Still going strong today – and always crowded – the bar was originally known as Mom's until 1960 when it was bought by singer Hattie Louise 'Tootsie' Bess. Why Orchid Lounge? Well, when Bess asked a decorator to spruce up the front of her bar, she returned to find he's painted in purple. The Orchid Lounge name was struck and the place has remained the colour purple ever since. What makes the place special is its proximity to the Ryman. Over the years, artists playing there – Dolly Parton, Porter Wagoner, Marty Stuart and more – would nip over to Tootsie's for a drink or an impromptu jam session. Guys like Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson would meet there to write songs. They also did their best to keep on Tootsie's good side. If you tried to raise hell in her bar, or dawdle when it was way past last orders, the landlady would give you a swift jab with a hat pin.

© Getty Images

CA$H FLOW

Billboard reveals its greatest country cash cows

The Billboard Greatest All-Time Country Artists list ranks the Top 100 country stars by record sales, and as such it makes pretty fascinating reading – like having Dolly Parton all the way down at Number 18, while Merle Haggard manages to surpass his old mate Willie Nelson and blag the Number 2 spot. Or even that George Strait is Number 1 – it probably helps having recorded 29 studio albums in 35 years!

Of the newer acts featured, Rascal Flatts are at 28 and Eric Church is down at 98. We'll put money on Florida Georgia Line appearing on the list one day, but they're not there yet.

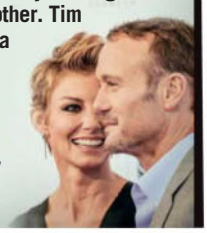
TOP 20 ARTISTS

1 George Strait	11 Waylon Jennings
2 Merle Haggard	12 Buck Owens
3 Willie Nelson	13 Hank Williams Jr
4 Alabama	14 Johnny Cash
5 Conway Twitty	15 Kenny Rogers
6 Charley Pride	16 George Jones
7 Reba McEntire	17 Loretta Lynn
8 Garth Brooks	18 Dolly Parton
9 Alan Jackson	19 Kenny Chesney
10 Tim McGraw	20 Ronnie Milsap

Faith Hill and Tim McGraw to be inducted into Music City Walk of Fame

Country's nicest couple, Faith Hill and Tim McGraw, will be the 74th and 75th stars to be inducted into Nashville's Walk of Fame. The two superstars, who tied the knot 20 years ago but still seem to be very much in love, will join other legends such as Emmylou Harris, Dolly Parton and Keith Urban.

"Faith Hill and Tim McGraw both came to Nashville in the 1980s with big dreams and huge talent," said Nashville mayor Megan Barry. "Driven by their determination and a lot of hard work, they eventually found great success – and each other. Tim and Faith have made a big difference in our city, not only with their music but also with their generous contributions to many important causes."



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Ex-rocker blasts New Country stars

No doubt whipping up a media storm to promote his new album, Aaron Lewis, the ex-singer with hard rockers Staind now reborn as a country artist, has blasted stars such as Sam Hunt and Luke Bryan. "I'd like to thank Sam Hunt – oh, I know, he's so pretty to look at," said Lewis on stage in Colorado. "I'd like to thank Luke Bryan, for most of his stuff – he surprises me every once in a while. I would like to thank Dan + Shay. I'd like to thank Cole Swindell. And every other motherf***er that's just choking the life out of country music."

© Getty Images

Hot shot

THE BLACK LILLIES

Hail from **Knoxville, Tennessee**
For fans of **The Infamous Stringdusters, Little Feat**

It could have all gone belly-up for the Black Lillies. In 2015, two BL veterans Tom Pryor and Robert Richards left. It was an amicable split, but the group had just fundraised the money to record what would become their fourth album through PledgeMusic. They'd also selected a producer and even booked a studio. "It was a blow and it went through my head that this could be it, that we might be over," says frontman Cruz Contreras. "But I did some honest thinking, and what it really boils down to is this: we had a responsibility to our fans, we owed it to them for their support, so we got to work."

The resulting album, *Hard To Please*, is the band's first to use an outside producer (Ryan Hewitt). "It was definitely the right time to get someone else to produce us," says Cruz. "*Whiskey Angel* was recorded in my living room, *100 Miles Of Wreckage* in an old school house and *Runaway Freeway Blues* in a small studio. With the fourth album, I wanted to be challenged; Ryan definitely did that. He really pushed me as a writer to get the best material and the band to get the perfect take. It helped we were in one of the best studios in the US."

He's talking about the House Of Blues Studio D in Nashville. "It's the original 60s studio, this old shotgun shack made in Memphis, where Isaac Hayes, Stevie Ray Vaughan and the Eagles recorded. They put it on the back of a tractor trailer and moved it to Nashville in 2010. Just being there was immense, you could feel the history of the place," says Cruz.

Cruz's own musical history is family based. "My dad played piano at home, he got me taking traditional piano lessons. My brother is an exceptional fiddle player and my parents got me a guitar so I could play with him. We spent our school years travelling around playing bluegrass and fiddle contests, that got me hooked."

Next, he went to the university of Tennessee and studied jazz piano. "I thought, if I study jazz, I'll be a better musician." On graduation, he was playing mandolin in Robinella And The CCstringband. "…and having a great time. But what motivates me to make music now is the same as what motivated me in the beginning. It's the search to discover as much music as I can. That search will never end." AC

Check out **The Black Lillies**
with all our other new music on our Spotify playlist **http://sptfy.com/1MNT**

© Joseph Llanes

"I'D TALK TO THE DEMONS AND THEY'D TALK BACK TO ME – AND I COULD HEAR THEM"

Johnny Cash

Eye witness

THE DEMONS OF... JOHNNY CASH

IN THE FIRST OF A NEW SERIES WHERE EYE WITNESSES TELL THE REAL STORY, THE MAN IN BLACK IS ARRESTED FOR POSSESSION...

Johnny Cash's career took off in 1956 when *I Walk The Line* became his first No. 1 single. By the end of that decade, he had sold more than six million records, but he had also become a serious pill-popper and hard drinker along the way.

Come the late summer of 1961 he and his first wife, Vivian Liberto, with their four daughters, Rosanne, Kathy, Cindy and Tara, moved from Encino in LA's San Fernando Valley, to a hillside home above Nye Road, Casitas Springs, along California State Route 33.

Vivian hoped this move would curb his growing issues with alcohol and drugs, as well as a blossoming romance with his touring partner June Carter. Instead, things rapidly got worse.

Johnny Cash: I still don't know why I ever moved to California. I had worked there quite a bit and thought I'd love living there. But I didn't really belong there. I got into the habit of amphetamines. I took them for seven years. I just liked the feel of them. It lifts you and, under certain conditions, it intensifies all your senses.

You took more pills to cover up the guilt feelings. I got to playing one against the other, the uppers against the downers, and it got to be a vicious, vicious circle. And they got to pulling me down.

Kathy Cash (daughter): [Mom] loved his career and was proud of him until he started taking drugs and stopped coming home.

Johnny Cash: My first marriage was in trouble when I lived in California, and I have to take blame for that – because no woman can live with a man who's strung out on amphetamines.

Roseanne Cash: In my pre-teen years, my father's drug addiction was really consuming him and my parents' marriage. I knew there was something wrong but I didn't know what it was; there was just this background tension and anxiety to all of those years.

Johnny Western (rhythm guitarist with Johnny Cash): As the pills took over, it became a nightmare. Many times, he shouldn't have been on the stage at all. I would go on and say: "Folks, this gentleman really belongs in a hospital, but he wanted to come out and give you what he could because you've paid your hard-earned money to see him, so he's gonna do his best."

Sometimes, he was so hoarse from those pills that he was just croaking: he didn't even sound like Johnny Cash. But the people loved him so much that they gave him standing ovations anyway.

© Getty Images

"FOLKS, THIS GENTLEMAN REALLY BELONGS IN A HOSPITAL, BUT HE WANTED TO COME OUT AND GIVE YOU WHAT HE COULD BECAUSE YOU'VE PAID YOUR HARD-EARNED MONEY TO SEE HIM, SO HE'S GONNA DO HIS BEST"

Johnny Western

© Getty Images

Vivian Liberto: All of the things that Johnny had called 'filthy and dirty', and had insisted would destroy our lives, were things he began to embrace.

Johnny Cash: I'd talk to the demons and they'd talk back to me – and I could hear them. I mean they'd say, 'Go on, John, take 20 more milligrams of Dexedrine, you'll be alright.'

Cindy Cash (daughter): Mom [was] always seeming worried and staying up late, but she never let us see her pain. Pills kind of led dad into a very destructive period in his life, and mom, unfortunately, paid the price.

Vivian Liberto: For me, it was darker, deeper… It was violence.

Saul Holiff (Johnny Cash's manager, 1960 to 1973): There was one occasion in Edmonton, Alberta, when Cash had taken too many pills and wouldn't go to the auditorium.

Johnny Cash: I got to where I had chronic laryngitis, because I kept myself so dried out. And my voice would go and stay gone.

Saul Holiff: He threw a beautiful Martin guitar at me. It missed me, but smashed the guitar. We had to cancel an entire tour of the Northwest because of that no-show.

© Getty Images

Johnny Cash walks inside the gates of Folsom Prison in 1964, preparing to perform the fourth of his legendary series of concerts for inmates there

Gordon Terry (fiddler and guitarist who worked with Cash): Johnny would pull change out of his pockets in an airport and spill pills all over the floor.

Roseanne Cash: It got to where it was like somebody else was coming home, not my daddy. The drugs were at work. He'd stay up all night. He and my mom would fight. It was so sad. He would always be having accidents. He turned the tractor over one day and almost killed himself, and we had to call the Fire Department after he set fire to the hillside.

One time, he took me on his lap and put his arms around me and said, "I'm glad to be alive," because the tractor could have rolled over on him. He held me so tightly. I felt so close to him. I wished it could always be like that. But then he'd be gone again.

On 2 October, 1965, a tour featuring Johnny Cash and June Carter comes to an end with a private function in Dallas, Texas. Afterwards, Cash flies to El Paso, where he asks a cab driver to take him over the border to Juárez to buy some pills. Cash waits in the cab as the driver goes into a Juárez bar to buy the drugs.

Johnny Cash: I slid down a little lower in the back seat each time someone looked my way. I had never done it this way before. I had several beers… I guess I was so tired, I lost my faculties.

The following day, Cash is arrested by narcotics agents at El Paso International Airport, while waiting to take off for Los Angeles. The officers suspect him of smuggling heroin from Mexico, but find instead 688 Dexedrine capsules and 475 Equanil tablets hidden inside a guitar case. Cash is jailed overnight.

Vivian Liberto: I immediately flew down to be by his side for the court appearance.

On 5 October, 1965, Cash is bailed and immediately leaves for California.

Vivian Liberto: The story and a photo of Johnny and me leaving the court house were published in papers coast-to-coast and worldwide. Everyone in the world saw the photo, including the Ku Klux Klan, who decided, after looking

Cash poses for a mug shot in El Paso, Texas. He was busted for possession of drugs as he returned from a trip to Juárez, Mexico in October 1965

© Getty Images

Johnny and June Carter Cash leaving Kansas State Prison in 1968

"I LOVED HIM TO DEATH, BUT I WOULD WANT TO STOMP HIM INTO THE GROUND SOMETIMES WHEN HE WAS ON THE PILLS"

Marshall Grant

at my picture, "Johnny Cash is married to a negro woman." Johnny and I received death threats.

Cindy Cash: It was on the front page of our local newspaper in Casitas Springs. I remember being terrified that my friends would see it.

Johnny Cash: I don't pretend to be anything I'm not. I am guilty of as many sins as the average person, but I don't say that I am guilty of any more than the average person.

On 8 October, 1965, Cash returns to live performing with a show at The Southern Methodist University, Nashville.

Marshall Grant (bassist, The Tennessee Two): He stayed in good shape for about a month and then slowly drifted back into pills. Two weeks after he started again, he was back in, head over heels, worse than ever.

On 28 December, 1965, Cash and Vivian return to El Paso where US District Court Judge D. W. Suttle fines him just over $1,000. The judge actually gave the singer a suspended jail sentence, because at the time, Dexedrine and Equanil were classed as prescription drugs as opposed to being illegal narcotics.

Johnny Cash (statement in court): I would like to ask for leniency from the court. I know that I have made a terrible mistake, and I would like to go back to rebuilding the image I had before this happened.

Kathy Cash: Dad would try so hard to stay positive, to make light of things, to always have a great sense of humour, but he would get into these moods where he just seemed to shut down and didn't want to talk or really do much of anything except spend time by himself in his office.

Marshall Grant: I loved him to death, but I would want to stomp him into the ground sometimes when he was on the pills. He was such a great man, such a great artist, but they just overpowered him. He could not go without them.

Johnny Cash: Over a period of time, you get to realising that the amphetamines are slowly burning you up... then you get paranoid, you think everybody is out to do you in. You don't trust anybody – even the ones who love you the most.

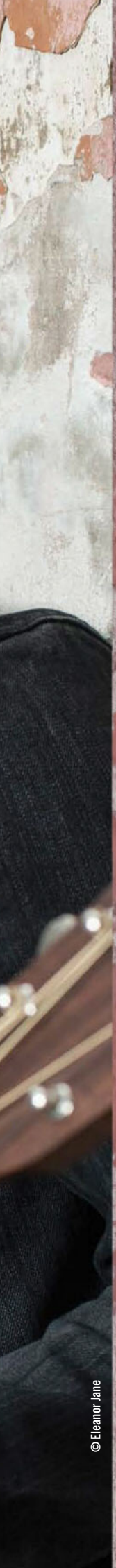
Marshall Grant: He loved those little pills. And it never was the hard stuff, the cocaine and all that crap like that, it was those little pills. That was all he wanted.

Johnny Cash: But a lot of good songs and albums came out of those years. I've had a lot of people say to me, 'Do you think you would have written more songs or better songs if you hadn't been on drugs?' But I don't think so. I think I wrote exactly what God meant for me to write.

Vivian filed for divorce from Johnny in summer 1966 on grounds of extreme mental cruelty and her request was granted in late 1967.

Johnny Cash: I don't carry any guilt about anything, including the hell I might have given people when I was using and abusing. I have no guilt about neglecting my family in those years, because that's all past. God has forgiven me.

John Carter Cash (son of Johnny Cash): The reality is that the suffering continued and it worsened, if anything, throughout the years. **CM**



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Aiming for the Stars

THE SHIRES, THE UK'S MOST CELEBRATED COUNTRY DUO, ARE BACK WITH ANOTHER BARNSTORMING ALBUM, 'MY UNIVERSE', AS HELEN JEROME REPORTS

The Shires' back story feels like a classic tale of meteoric rise and astounding success out of nowhere, conquering the UK charts and Nashville. But their real history is one of years of toiling individually as wedding and pub circuit singers, studying, selling mobile phones, almost quitting altogether, and then magically hooking up on Facebook to form the perfect country music duo.

Crissie Rhodes lives in Bedfordshire and Ben Earle was based in Hertfordshire when they met – hence the name The Shires – and they were only about half an hour's drive from each other. Ben's moved even closer to Crissie now, so when they need to rehearse they're just around the corner from each other.

Although they went straight into the UK Top 10 with their debut album, *Brave*, Crissie says they actually get recognised more in Nashville, four thousand miles away, than they do back home. ➡

"BRAVE, OUR FIRST ALBUM, DID BETTER THAN WE'D HOPED, BUT WE WANT TO KEEP MAKING BETTER AND BETTER MUSIC"

© Eleanor Jane

Supporting The Corrs at the Mercedes-Benz Arena in Berlin, in May of this year

© Getty Images

BIG STEP FORWARD

Meeting them one month before the release of *My Universe*, their second album, the most striking thing is how well they get on, finishing each other's sentences, complimenting and complementing each other, and both still giddy with their success. They know they've made a big step forward from their debut, which was "very much Lady Antebellum, Civil Wars", towards a newer country sound. They've pushed on. Even on the first album's cover, Ben feels they look like kids. "Confidence is the biggest difference now, especially going into the studio."

2016 has been remarkable in other ways too, as Ben became a father on the same day The Shires headlined Glastonbury's acoustic stage. "It was the most surreal day anyway," he says. "And it took a long time, 36 hours from the first contractions. Then, when [my son] River came out... I mean, we've had some pretty euphoric moments, played some huge stages, but this is completely different. It's impossible to put into words. He was a week late, and it had to be at 1.30 in the morning of the day we were headlining at Glastonbury! I had to drive down myself and I was knackered. I will never ever forget that day, ever."

But still neither of them really feels they've 'made it'. "I don't think we'll ever feel like we have," says Ben. "*Brave* did better than we'd hoped, but I want us to be in the charts in US Country, in Germany, Australia. We want to keep making better and better music." Crissie's just pleased that they no longer get laughed at for being into country music. "People understand it more," she says. "The perception has changed and now we don't have to be ashamed, and that's been a big stepping stone. A lot of people have taken to us; it's opened their world to country, the sound of the music, so many genres are crossing in with country. And there's lyrical content people can relate to; not so much rhinestones and cowboys!"

Choosing the new album's title saw them almost opt for another track, *Common Language*. But, as Ben says: "*My Universe* seemed to sum up everything. For us it's about, 'What is your universe?', 'What is my universe to you?'. And that changes over time. I definitely thought that with River being born. And country music was our universe as well. So that title felt right." For the cover of the album, Crissie, "the visual one", was thrilled that their new creative director achieved her vision of being on railroad tracks, and a deserty kind of look. "I absolutely loved that."

NASHVILLE

Writing and recording this second album in Nashville, was, says Ben, like walking into a memory. They used the exact same band, same producers minus one, same engineers, same studio, same everything, as on *Brave*. There's just one different player, Dave LaBruyere, on bass, with whom Crissie connected straight away. "We were all yoga and holistic things, and went off in our own little world!"

Writing meant a three-week trip to Nashville in March, working pretty much every day. Ben loves sitting in a room with fellow writers, evolving a song from a title or lyric. ▶▶

Five Shires songs you should know...

1. **I Just Wanna Love You** *from Brave, 2015*
   Perfect ballad to showcase their finely tuned country harmonies
2. **Islands In The Stream** *from Brave, 2015*
   Cover of Kenny and Dolly's classic hit
3. **Nashville Grey Skies** *from Brave, 2015*
   Tongue-in-cheek view of UK country music
4. **Daddy's Little Girl** *from My Universe, 2016*
   Crissie's song for fathers and daughters
5. **Desperate** *from My Universe, 2016*
   Shires stripped back to piano and vocals

Playing the Shepherd's Bush Empire, London, in October of last year

© Getty Images

"That's what I find really inspirational," he says, "that's where we enjoy ourselves most. You get into this zone. It's amazing what they do out there. The way they keep coming up with new stuff."

Auditioning co-writers is sort of like speed dating, according to Crissie. "We set up a lot of the writes with a Nashville songwriter called Jeff Cohen. You go into the room and bring what you've got, feelings wise, to the table and start writing on that. They're there to enhance and work with you."

DRINKING FIREBALLS

Inspiration can appear at the strangest times and, for Ben, it came after a heavily-delayed flight and a heavy night of drinking fireballs – whiskey with cinnamon: "Literally the most drunk I've ever been. But I do believe there's something about when you're hungover, you're a bit more honed in creatively." Ben's other major strength is working out how the album will flow. Everyone, including producers and A&R folk, emailed their opinions on contenders and also-rans for the album. Meanwhile, out of 35 tracks, Ben came up with the entire running order straight away. He realises that with streaming and downloads the order isn't as important to people now, but it is for him. And with the album being released on vinyl, he's going to have to go out and buy a record player!

PERSONAL AND HEARTFELT

Right at the heart of the new album is a song pairing that happened purely by chance, and is about as personal and heartfelt as you could imagine. Crissie was writing with a trio of songwriters and Ben was working alone. And both were composing songs about their fathers – Crissie's father very present through her life, and now deceased; Ben's father very absent during his childhood, but still around. Crissie wrote *Daddy's Little Girl* with three people whose fathers were still alive, but she didn't mention that her dad had passed away. "It's such a touchy subject with me, and I found a way to make the song work so it could be about a dad that's still alive or one that's passed on. That's the beauty of that song. I've even had some dads come up to me, saying, honestly, they were just about in tears, and had to hold it back, because they were thinking of their own daughters. Strangely, at the same time, Ben had written his dad song. Neither of us knew the other had written these songs; the reveal happened in Nashville."

Ben says *Everything You Never Gave* is the most honest song he's ever written. "It's something I've always wanted to do, but when I found out I was going to be a dad, I thought about all the things that I want to give to my child. At the time, we were convinced we were having a girl; then we had a boy, but I felt like I shouldn't change it. It was difficult to write and I haven't discussed it with my dad, to be honest, but it was important to write. I think one of the things you're always trying to do as a songwriter is to write something that's really personal, really specific; and, almost by definition, that then becomes universal, because if you felt it then someone else must have felt it."

They recorded it just before midnight, with the lights down and the candles on, though Ben doesn't want to make it sound like a hard job. "We're not miners down the mines, but actually baring your soul like that is pretty painful, especially for Crissie talking about her dad." Singing *Daddy's Little Girl* live on stage was very emotional for her. "I couldn't look at anybody in the audience; my mum and my sister were there and I knew it was going to be difficult to perform. But we got through it."

COMMON LANGUAGE

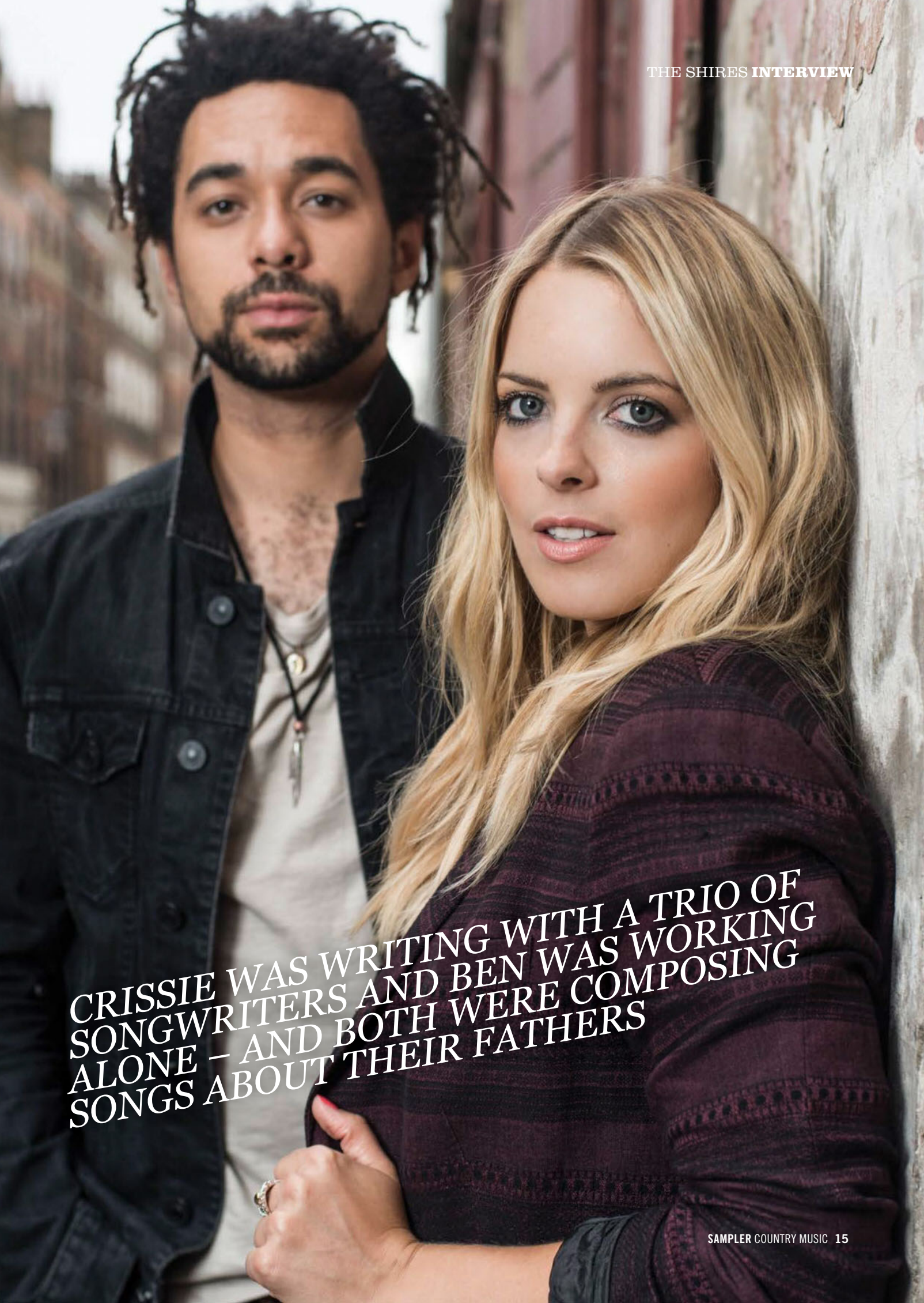
The Shires mix it up on the tracks *Common Language* and *Naked* by including a string quartet on both, involving their violinist friend, Kerenza Peacock, who also plays with Adele. Ben used to play fiddle as a kid and loves strings, and he feels they bring songs such as *Common Language* to life: "It put the polish on those songs and makes them stand out."

Five Things YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE SHIRES...

The influence of Charlotte Church, Britney Spears, Nina Nesbitt and Queen Elizabeth II

1. Ben was a head chorister at St George's, Windsor, where he once sang for the Queen.
2. Ben wanted to marry Charlotte Church when he was 11, as she was also a chorister, and the pin-up on his wall!
3. The Shires found their manager through a guy they met at a tiny cider festival in the Greyhound pub in Haynes, Bedfordshire.
4. Crissie shared a bedroom with her sister, and their pin-ups were the Backstreet Boys, NSYNC, Hanson, and Britney Spears.
5. Scottish co-writer Nina Nesbitt started collaborating with The Shires after approaching them on Twitter.

© Eleanor Jane



CRISSIE WAS WRITING WITH A TRIO OF SONGWRITERS AND BEN WAS WORKING ALONE – AND BOTH WERE COMPOSING SONGS ABOUT THEIR FATHERS

The Shires FAVOURITE COUNTRY ARTISTS

Ben "Lady Antebellum, and Eric Paslay – I love his songwriting, which is that next level."

© Getty Images

Crissie "Leann Rimes – growing up through the 90s and early 00s, I turned to her for every vocal I was learning. Plus Faith Hill, Martina McBride and Alison Krauss... Those were my leading ladies."

© Getty Images

For Crissie, *Common Language* isn't really even country: "It's more classic pop, more James Taylor, that kind of hypnotic vibe." Ben is finally happy that, with *Naked*, they've achieved his ambition to write a big 90s/00s ballad, like those by Leann Rimes or Faith Hill.

Then there are the raucous, drum-driven tracks, *Beats To Your Rhythm* and *Not Even Drunk Right Now*, both written with their drummer chum, Dan McDougall. They aren't showcases for the vocals, they're all about fun – in contrast with the remarkable closing song, *Desperate*, which has basically no production and is completely stripped back. As Crissie says: "That's a great way to end, because that's what it's about for us." Ben wasn't at all sure about *Desperate* when he wrote it, but when Crissie started singing it he changed his mind. "I couldn't stop singing it. Every time I was walking about I'd be singing that song. I felt really strongly that it needed to go on the album and I wanted us to do a version of it. We'd run out of time with the musicians, so we just recorded it with piano and vocals, which is how we first started. And that song gets me every time."

It was the same with the album's title track. Ben didn't think it was particularly good, and then, when Crissie sang it, "It came to life," says Ben, "because I honestly believe that Crissie is a better singer. When she started singing it was like, this is going to be the biggest hit on the album!"

Having played bigger shows, they've suddenly found their ambition has changed hugely. They want bigger songs and a bigger sound, which is the aim on *My Universe*. "The verse is quiet, and the lyric is almost cheesy, when you say it out loud," he explains. "It's like amateur Shakespeare, but sometimes that's the best way to say it. It's how I feel, especially with River being born. It is a love song, and the best love songs can be about someone, they can be almost religious, or about platonic love, or unconditional love for a baby. I really believe that for the rest of my life he will be my universe".

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Talking of bigger sounds, it's Bruce Springsteen who comes to mind on their song *Drive*, and it turns out that they wrote it with Kip Moore, who happens to be a massive fan of The Boss. On *Save Me*, their co-writer was Brian White, who is also a preacher who does a lot of Christian music. It's a clever song with a twist that came after The Shires had listened to loads of Chris Stapleton, and this blues song just rolled on out in their first session. The honesty of the verse still hits Ben every time he hears it. "It's that fight that you have with yourself every single day when you get up and you look in the mirror," says Crissie. "But you're fighting with yourself about something that doesn't really matter."

© Eleanor Jane

However, Crissie really wasn't convinced when she saw the lyrics of *A Thousand Hallelujahs*: "Straight away, I said there were too many religious words. Then the production of it changed my mind, and it became an absolute tune for me." And, of course, she sees similar references in songs like *H.O.L.Y.* by Florida Georgia Line and *Take Me To C hurch* by Hozier.

One song that everyone will identify with is *Other People's Things*, about when items put in drawers or stuffed away bring back memories of people, places and things. Crissie has a good few boxes at home, with newspaper cuttings from when she first started, every talent show she was in, even teddy bears. And they've both kept pretty much every pass from pretty much every show. "You remember each show instantly then, it all floods back," she says. "And that song paints so many pictures for me."

FAME AND FANS

The Shires are only now coming to terms

with their fame and fans. Ben says that when their success started he even felt a bit guilty, just going up on stage and doing what he loved. He had to sit down and think about it: to make sense of what they were doing and whether it was selfish. Then something happened. "The messages started coming in on Facebook, people saying they had their first dance to *Brave*, or that it got them through heart surgery, and they played it in recovery," Crissie adds, "And another girl came out to *Brave* as lesbian. She said it gave her that strength to announce to her friends and family that that's who she was, and now she could get on with her life."

"So you have to remember not to change anything," says Ben, "because *Brave* wasn't written for someone to come out to, it was about how I've been in this dark place, but it gets better..."

So what's the secret of The Shires, and how have they gelled and grown together so quickly and easily? Crissie says they both bring different strengths to the table: "It just kind of works, doesn't it?" And Ben says it's really nice to share all this with someone: "I feel sorry for solo artists when they come off stage, whether it's a good or bad gig. Whereas when we come off stage you look at each other and go, 'That was great'." "Or 'that wasn't that great!'" quips Crissie.

"It's funny to think that in another life we would never have been friends," says Ben. "We get on really well. Although, apart from musically, we have nothing in common. But music is everything to us." **CM**

Crissie and Ben all dressed up for the BBC Music Awards in Birmingham last Christmas

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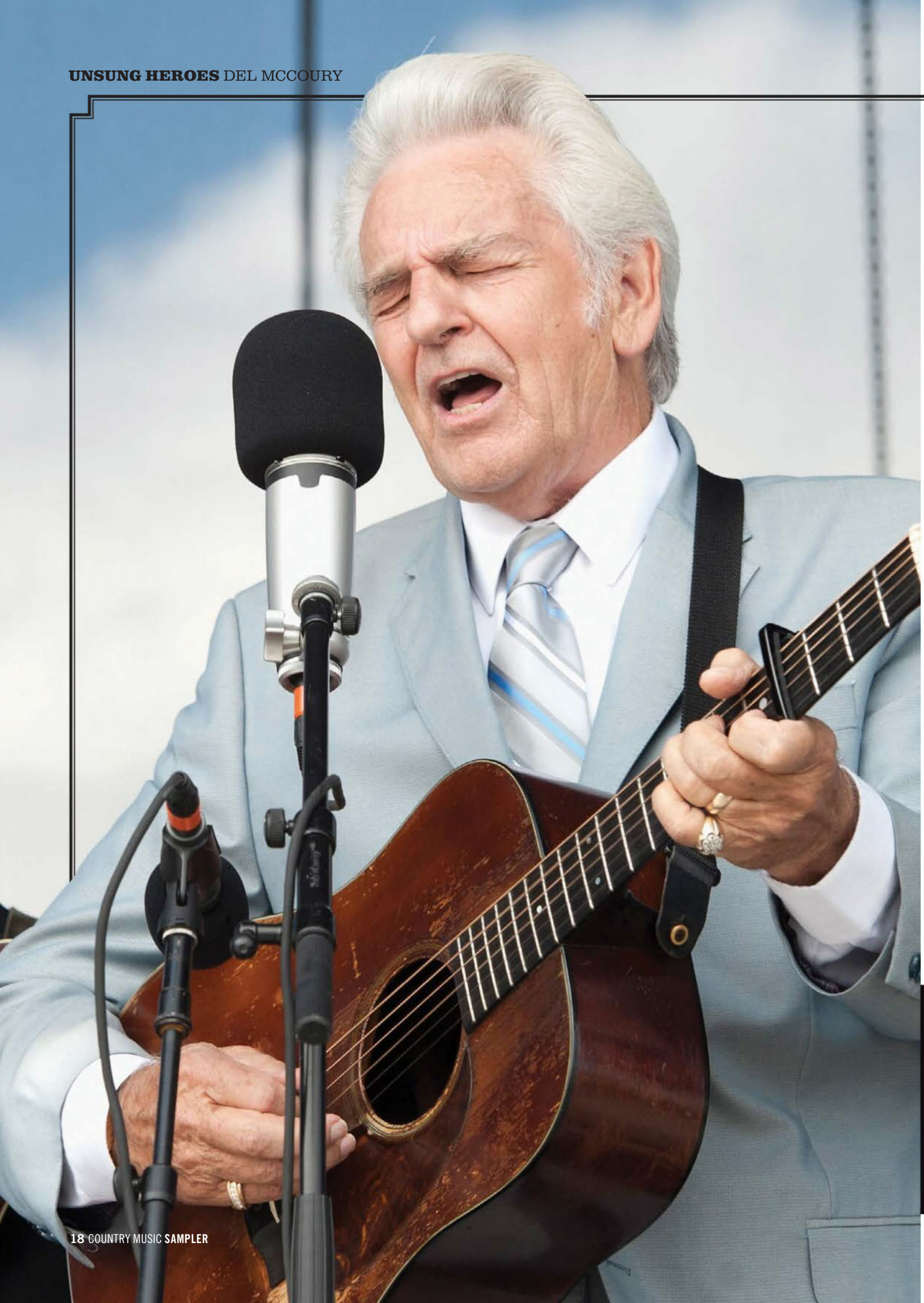


Unsung Heroes no.1

GIANTS OF COUNTRY YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD OF...

DEL MCCOURY

If you don't already know this bluegrass maestro, you are in for a big treat

Country music ploughs such a wide field these days, it's sometimes hard to know who's genuine and who's simply hitchin' a ride to a newly trending pasture. But there's one artist who's embraced both tradition and change with not only faultless taste, but the stamp of 'authenticity' that's way beyond marketing yap: Del McCoury. With the recent years' passing of Doc Watson, Ralph Stanley, Earl Scruggs and even Merle Haggard, bluegrass greats are ever-dwindling. So don't you dare let Del pass you by!

Born in 1939 in York, Pennsylvania, Delano Floyd McCoury started out as banjoist in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys in 1963, eventually going solo, and his music remains a touchstone for both classic and millennial bluegrass. Despite his pedigree, McCoury was no overnight success, however. Before a relocation to Nashville, he cut plenty of albums but was often a 'weekend warrior' performer, working day jobs in logging, trucking and construction to support his family. But eventually, under the nose of Music City scouts, McCoury got his rewards in the 90s. The timing was perfect – as Music Row learned how to crack the pop charts and MTV, The Del McCoury Band (now featuring sons Ronnie and Rob) planted a foothold in country's illustrious past. While hit albums were rare, McCoury's pristine tenor found approval from the likes of Steve Earle, Bruce Springsteen, Elvis Costello and Alison Krauss.

And Del McCoury could embrace modernity, covering Richard Thompson as happily as Bill Monroe, and guesting on tour with prog polymaths Phish, who are genuine fans. And, even at 77, McCoury is switched on: his band offer recordings on USB drives, available immediately after concerts.

With over 30 International Bluegrass Music Awards, double Grammys, his own record label and eclectic DelFest shows, McCoury has entered the realm of genuine National Treasure. He deals with his pan-generational fanbase with wry humility: "I guess we have a lot of fans that we made in the 60s," he says. "We also always had a lot of young folks. We are very fortunate that they like us and don't forget us."

Inviting McCoury to pen new music for unpublished poems of father Woody, Nora Guthrie said: "If my dad had had a band, it would possibly have sounded very much like Del's." Nora calls McCoury "the grand master", and in bluegrass circles he undoubtedly is. As Vince Gill opines: "I'd rather hear Del McCoury sing *Are You Teasing Me* than just about anything. Even after 50 years, he's at the top of everybody's list of what's going on today with bluegrass." **CM**

© Getty Images

Del's Boys

Key collaborators with the bluegrass boss from then, now and beyond the grave...

DAVID GRISMAN
★ They first met at a Bill Monroe concert in '63 when McCoury was Bill's banjoist and, as Del & Dawg, have been playing live together for half a century. Working with sheet music stands and stools, Del & Dawg will knock your barn door down.

STEVE EARLE
★ Joint-album *The Mountain* (1999) boasts some of Earle's most keenly observational traditional songs with diamond-bright bluegrass backing from the Del McCoury Band. A genuine high-point for both artists.

THE PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND
★ McCoury's album with TPHJB, *American Legacies* (2011), is a good-time delight, showing just how interwoven the two great American traditions of jazz and bluegrass really are.

DIERKS BENTLEY
★ McCoury plays on just one track of Bentley's *Up On The Ridge* (2010) – though it is a newgrass take of U2's *Pride*. Del has known Dierks for many years, and is mighty proud of his protégé's rise.

WOODY GUTHRIE
★ Invited to write new music and sing unreleased lyrics/writings of Woody Guthrie on *Del And Woody* (2016), McCoury and band more than deliver. It sounds genuinely ancient. In the best way.

Classic Album no. 1

RED HEADED STRANGER

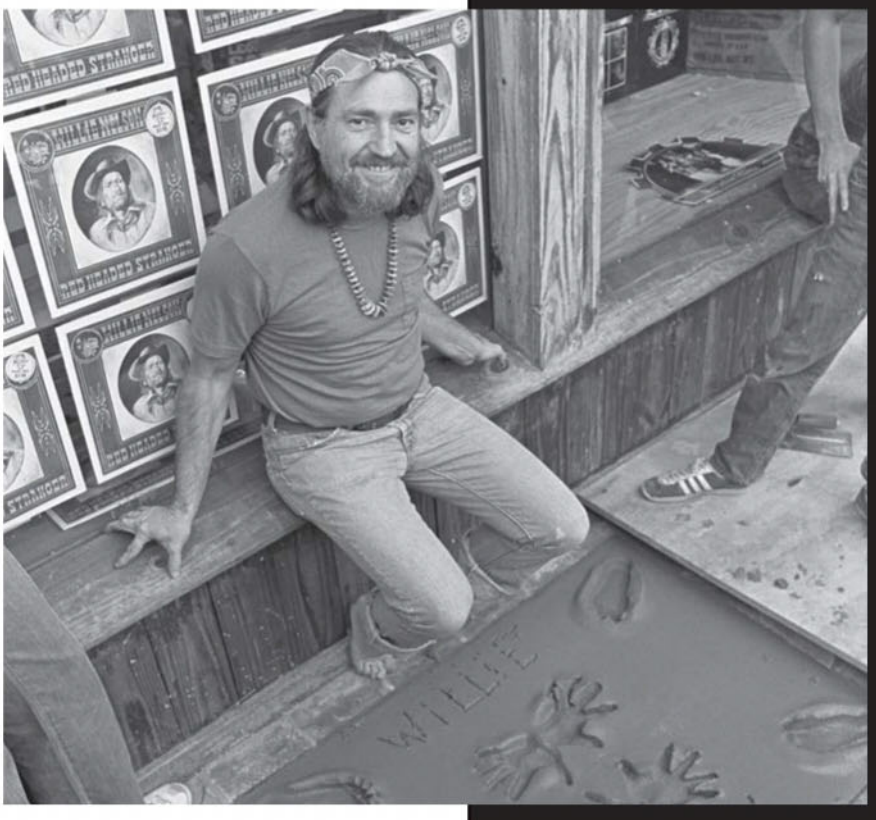
Willie Nelson

1975 COLUMBIA RECORDS

The album wasn't what Columbia Records wanted to hear. Having decided to get into country, they managed to snap up Willie Nelson, as Atlantic had just dropped their entire country roster, Nelson included, as a failed experiment. Willie was pretty well known even back then; he'd released 13 albums for RCA, then quit and joined Atlantic and released two more. He was best-known as a songwriter, though, for songs such as *Crazy* that Patsy Cline had turned into a massive hit, and not so much as a performer. The album he delivered to Columbia was essentially just him, a guitar, a piano player, a drummer and a 'concept'. It was all about the performance. There were no backing vocals nor string sections, and there was no showbiz to the record. It was pure and simple like a mountain stream, and it was completely out of step with the rest of the industry. This was the era of *Blanket on the Ground and Rhinestone Cowboy,* and country music was all about razzmatazz.

Columbia couldn't tell Willie to re-record the album; they could ask, sure, but Willie's contract gave him full artistic control, something that had been a catalyst for him leaving RCA and Nashville in the first place. Country stars tended not to dictate production in Nashville. Willie was no ordinary star. New Columbia president and country fan Bruce Lundvall played the record to other execs. They hated it too. It sounded as if it had been recorded in Willie's living room. Lundvall took it home, and played it again and again over the weekend. By the end, he loved it.

According to his biography, when he came back into work on Monday morning Lundvall gathered together the Columbia staff and told them they were going to release the record. "It's not going to sell," he warned them. "But it's Willie's labour of love and it'll always appeal to collectors." There were some legendary boardroom clashes before the album was eventually released, unchanged. The rest, of course, is history. The album went multi-platinum and is regarded as one of the most influential records of all time. Nelson himself is often referred to as the 'Red Headed Stranger' to this day, and there was even a film made starring Willie in the eponymous title role. Nelson remains characteristically modest about its success: "I wasn't really that smart," he says. "I was playing areas down in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, and I knew what [the audiences] liked. I knew they liked this music, the real simple three-chord country stuff. It was missing on the radio, so they were glad to see it come back. I didn't do anything brilliant. And I didn't think it was radical. Maybe a little reckless. I just jumped in front of the crowd and became the leader." **CM**



A concept album! Really??

Red Headed Stranger **tells the story of a preacher who kills his wife and her lover and then travels the wilderness. Another slaying, of a 'yellow haired lady' who tries to steal the stranger's horse, follows. On side two, the stranger finds redemption and love again in Denver and finishes his life as a contented man. The album switches viewpoint from song to song, sometimes seen through the eyes of the red headed stranger, sometimes from the third person, and sometimes in the form of a chorus. As well as original composition, Nelson weaves in country standards such as the 1947 Fred Rose song,** ***Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain,*** **which Willie uses to show the remorse felt by the stranger after killing his wife. There's even a hymn,** ***Just As I Am,*** **which would have been familiar to most of Willie's listeners. It's a hymn of redemption from sin, of course. The album was suggested to Nelson by the title track** ***Red Headed Stranger,*** **written by Edith Lindeman Calisch and Carl Stutz in 1953. Willie knew the version by Arthur 'Guitar-Boogie' Smith and played the record on his kids' radio show in the 50s – and used to sing it for his daughter Lana as a bedtime song.**

RED HEADED STRANGER Willie Nelson

Willie Nelson *Vocals, guitar* ★ **Paul English** *Drums* ★ **Jody Payne** *Guitars, mandolin* ★ **Bee Spears** *Bass*
Bobbie Nelson *Piano* ★ **Mickey Raphael** *Harmonica* ★ **Bucky Meadows** *Guitar* ★ **Billy English** *Drums*

Side 1

1 **Time of the Preacher** *Willie Nelson* 2:26
2 **I Couldn't Believe It Was True** *Eddy Arnold, Wally Fowler* 1:32
3 **Time of the Preacher Theme** *Willie Nelson* 1:13
4 ***Medley*** **Blue Rock Montana/Red Headed Stranger** *Nelson/Carl Stutz, Edith Lindeman* 1:36
5 **Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain** *Fred Rose* 2:21
6 **Red Headed Stranger** *Carl Stutz, Edith Lindeman* 4:00
7 **Time of the Preacher Theme** *Willie Nelson* 0:25
8 **Just As I Am** *Charlotte Elliott, William B Bradbury* 1:45

Side 2

1 **Denver** *Willie Nelson* 0:53
2 **O'er the Waves** *Juventino Rosas, arr Willie Nelson* 0:47
3 **Down Yonder** *L. Wolfe Gilbert* 0:47
4 **Can I Sleep in Your Arms** *Hank Cochran* 5:24
5 **Remember Me** *Melba Mable Bourgeois* 2:52
6 **Hands on the Wheel** *Bill Callery* 4:22
7 **Bandera** *Willie Nelson* 2:19

GARTH BROOKS

GUNSLINGER **PEARL/SONY**

3 ★★★☆☆

The country big-hitter is back with a stripped-down and serviceable rather than spectacular collection of tunes, with a few highlights

The thunder still rolls, if a little more sedately. 27 years after he made the country scene and went on to change it permanently, a new Garth Brooks record remains an event. Less so in the UK – but it's still the case back home where, one week before the holidays, he commanded three of the top five placings – with *Gunslinger* and a pair of Christmas releases with his better half, Trisha Yearwood.

This follows *Man Against Machine*, the 2014 release that ended a 13-year drought of new material. The latest endeavour has quite a 'live' feel to it, with a frequent rocking demeanour. Long-time devotees are already lapping it up, and it's a perfectly serviceable record full of solid work, even if the feeling persists that the songs aren't special enough to challenge Brooks' choicest cuts.

Brooks has his writing hat on throughout: whereas he only co-wrote three of the 14 titles on *Man Against Machine*, here, the tally is nine out of 10. There are many co-credits, but it's Kim Williams who gets the sole dedication on the sleeve.

Honky Tonk Somewhere opens the record, a jaunty if lightweight number that perhaps attempts to recapture the mood of *Friends In Low Places*. The lyrical conceit is uncomplicated and elsewhere, especially on the next track, *Weekend*, the idea of stripping it all back to basics and turning the clock back to the early 90s borders on the simplistic. The advanced wordplay of *Two Of A Kind, Workin' On A Full House* seems some way off.

> You sense that, as an artist, he still has the wherewithal to surprise us again

Pure Adrenaline, written by Garth and Gordon Kennedy, has the rockiest edge, and there's more of a group feel to *Bang Bang*, with harmonies that include Trisha's. The *Bonnie And Clyde* narrative is far more compelling, as it is on the closing *8Teen*, a tale of youthful adventure that even includes a knowing line about "the night the thunder rolled".

The best of the bunch is *Whiskey To Wine*, in which husband and wife trade vocal lines and Yearwood's powerful, limber tones remind you of how underused her vocal talents have often been in recent times.

The notion of Brooks returning to simpler days, without the apparent obsession to be the biggest and best in music history is more than welcome. It's often underserved by some so-so material here, but you sense that, as an artist, he still has the wherewithal to surprise us again. **PS**

★ **STAND-OUT TRACKS** ***Pure Adrenaline, Bang Bang, 8Teen***

PAUL CAUTHEN

MY GOSPEL **LIGHTNING ROD RECORDS**

4 ★★★★☆☆

Paul Cauthen's soulful, tobacco-burnished baritone was one of the several prize assets of his former Texicana band Sons Of Fathers, but his full-length solo debut is – pun intended – a revelation. *My Gospel* sees him reach back to his roots in Tyler, Texas, singing in the Church Of Christ choir and soaking up Elvis, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings.

Producer Beau Bedford brings an authentic, retro sound to Cauthen's stories of love and redemption. There's a hint of Jerry Reed on keep-on-keepin'-on opener *Still Drivin'*, and, a typical example of the whole, the heartfelt *Young As You'll Ever Be* is rich in musical ideas and mood, right up to its surprising Beatles-y closing harmonies. At times, Cauthen's imagery is boilerplate country (the twanging *Saddle*), but his lyrics are more often striking (as in this excerpt from *Grand Central*: "Grand Central Station sounded better than graduation").

A charismatic presence, he's convincing as both the hopeful lover (*Hanging Out On The Line*) and the more rueful one (*Let It Burn*), and when he waxes messianic on the uplifting title track, you'd better be sitting up straight in your pew. For lovers of meaningful, outlaw-infused country, *My Gospel* is good news indeed. **GM**

★ **STAND-OUT TRACKS** ***As Young As You'll Ever Be, Be There Soon***

SEAN MCCONNELL

SEAN MCCONNELL **ROUNDER**

4 ★★★★☆☆

The son of folk singers, Sean McConnell's been making records since he was 15, but this is the first album he hasn't released himself, since being snapped up by Rounder. Yet he mixes up genres confidently, from folky mysticism to country rock, and gives his finely crafted, deceptively simple songs added texture with Alyssa Bonagura's harmony vocals.

The slamdunk opening track, *Holy Days*, has hooks aplenty, with an imaginary camera taking snapshots to remember, and *Best We've Ever Been* sings of addressing the past by pouring a box of Polaroids all over the floor. Other highlights of the record include G*host Town*, which channels peak-'*Small Town*' Mellencamp, and *Bottom Of The Sea*, in which McConnell faces his inevitable mortality, and wants to leave a legacy. *Beautiful Rose* has the mandolin licks of Danny Rader, who adds banjo, guitar and bouzouki elsewhere, and the upbeat *Hey Mary* is a conventional country-rock song. For the rest of the album, *Queen Of Saint Mary's Choir* references his parents; *One Acre Of Land* is contemplative, and they lead to the dramatic closer, *Babylon*, thinking of what man has done and "trying to find out where the hell we went wrong"… which feels like a pretty concise summary of 2016 itself. **HJ**

★ **STAND-OUT TRACKS** ***Holy Days, Ghost Town, Babylon***

VARIOUS ARTISTS

CHARTBUSTERS USA: SPECIAL COUNTRY EDITION **ACE**

BEST FOR... COUNTRY HISTORIANS

5 ★★★★★☆

Gathering 24 country songs that hit the US Country charts and then crossed over into the Hot 100, this superbly compiled CD details how much overlap there once was between pop and country radio. As compiler Tony Rounce notes, the rise of the Nashville Sound (with strings replacing fiddle/steel guitar) made it easier for country records to be played on pop radio. Not that all the songs gathered here are orchestrated epics: things kick off with George Jones' *The Race Is On*, while Buck Owens' *I've Got A Tiger By The Tail*, Roger Miller's *Chug-A-Lug*, Jerry Lee Lewis's *What's Made Milwaukee Famous*, Merle Haggard's *Okie From Muskogee* and The Statler Brothers' infectious *Flowers On The Wall* keep things rocking. Also here is the biggest country crossover of the decade: Jeannie C Riley's version of Tom T Hall's *Harper Valley PTA* which topped both Country and the Hot 100 charts simultaneously! Housewife favourites Glen Campbell, Marty Robbins, Billie Jo Spears, Jim Reeves, Eddy Arnold, Charley Pride and Tammy Wynette all offer epic ballads (with Tammy, it's not the two you might imagine: Rounce chooses *Singing My Song*, which he qualifies as "a much better record" than her signature tunes).

Porter Wagoner's *The Carroll County Accident* demonstrates how times have changed: it's hard to imagine a record starkly chronicling a disaster would succeed on any chart today. Every song here is detailed and illustrated in the booklet that accompanies the CD – making this a 'must-have'. **GC**

★ **STAND-OUT TRACKS** ***Harper Valley PTA, Flowers On The Wall***

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